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# CHRIST THE COUNSELLOR

"AND HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED—COUNSELLOR."
—ISA. ix. 6.

# CHRIST THE COUNSELLOR

OR

## Practical Teaching for an Age of Progress

BEING AN

*EXPOSITION OF OUR LORD'S SERMON ON THE MOUNT*

BY THE

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# INTRODUCTION.

MAN is progressive. The bird builds its nest to-day precisely as its progenitors did before the Flood. The song of the nightingale to-day is the same gushing, trilling descant that was heard in the Ark. But man advances. He neither builds, nor sings, nor works, nor plays, after the fashions of his forefathers.

Not only does each individual man advance, during his brief and rapid transit from the cradle to the grave, but the whole race advances, in knowledge, skill, and wealth. Every age is therefore an Age of Progress; and if the age in which we live be specially so designated, it is only because the progress of human thought and human invention is more rapid in these days of steam and electricity than it has ever been before.

Man is progressive; but God is the same. Jesus Christ, who is the eternal and only-begotten Son of God, is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." Jesus Christ is the Divine LOGOS, the eternal WORD, the Way, and the Truth, and the Life, by whom alone man can come unto God. He is called "The Word of God," because He is the Revealer of God's Counsel, the Expounder of God's Will, the Radiance of the Father's Glory. In the Volume of the Book it is written of Him, —"And His Name shall be called Wonderful, COUNSELLOR, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."

CHRIST is the Divine and Sovereign COUNSELLOR of Man. Man has, indeed, never had any other *true* Counsellor than Christ. It was of Him that Moses wrote: the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of all that was written in the Psalms and in the Prophets. In the days of His flesh He gave counsel with His own lips, speaking as One that had inherent power and authority. His Apostles, speaking and writing by His Spirit, taught mankind to observe whatsoever He had commanded them. We therefore, as Christians, are bound to acknowledge no Lord or Master but Christ; no Prophet, no Priest, no King, but Christ. The Church in heaven and in earth has no Head but Christ. Earthly teachers and rulers, in Church and State, have no rightful authority but what they receive from Him, and are

entitled to no obedience but as His ministers. We acknowledge no rule of faith but the doctrine of Christ, as it is set forth in the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. We acknowledge no rule of duty, but the precepts of "CHRIST THE COUNSELLOR."

The Counsels of Christ are for all time; for every man, and for every age; for every condition of human life, and for every development of human society. We are complete in Christ, for He is the Head of all principality and power. Let man progress as he may, or as he thinks he may, he can never progress so far as to be above the need of Christ's counsel; never so far but that the wisdom of God, of which Christ is the embodiment, shall be infinitely ahead of him. Whatever man knows or has known, he has learned, directly or indirectly, from Christ. And whatever he shall hereafter know either in this world or in that which is to come, he will learn from "CHRIST THE COUNSELLOR." Not only is it impossible for the march of intellect, in this Age of Progress, to go beyond the Counsels of Christ; but with the highest intellectual culture, and the highests flights we can accomplish on the most daring wing, we cannot advance in the right way otherwise than as He directs and enables us. This is no doubt a very humiliating reflection for the bold thinkers, the free inquirers of this emphatically "fast" age. Our men of science and

scholarship would sometimes persuade us to shut up the Bible, like an old schoolbook which has served its purpose and is no longer required. But this we are not prepared to do, for the world, with all its wisdom, has nothing better to offer us. The Bible is not out of date. It is still very far in advance of the most "advanced modern thought." No better Way of Salvation has been discovered than that revealed in the Bible; and the System of Morality therein propounded is so pure and exalted, that nothing further is to be desiderated for the realization of a perfect world.

The writer of the following pages has endeavoured in the course of his ministry faithfully to carry out these convictions. Believing that, though heaven and earth pass away, Christ's words shall NOT pass away, he believes that the best antidote to the poisons of infidelity and superstition, which Satan is in these days casting out of his many mouths like floods, is the faithful preaching of "Christ crucified" as the true Word of Life, and the exhibition of His Divine counsels as the true guide of human conduct. At the same time, he is aware that the preacher or writer who addresses himself to his fellow-men in the present Age of Progress must not expect to command attention, much less to exert any beneficial influence, if he confine himself entirely to the old ruts, and be content with the same formulas of thought and language that sufficed for a

slower age. He fully recognizes and contends for the necessity of maintaining "the old paths" and "the old landmarks," both with respect to the essential doctrines of the Gospel and the obligations of the Moral law. But at the same time, the writer believes that Christianity is both an expansive and a progressive religion. We have, it is true, only the same old Gospel to preach; but in the method of preaching it, and in the application of its doctrines to the correction of human errors, and to the instruction of mankind in the way of righteousness and peace, we ought clearly to be progressive. The Church of Christ ought not to be obnoxious to the charge of being the only champion of illiberality in an Age of Freedom, and the only hindrance to advancement in an Age of Progress. The Truth of God has nothing to apprehend from the discoveries of science, or from the researches of scholarship. The Church of Christ, so far from manifesting any fear of the light, ought herself, in the true spirit of her mission, to fling wide the doors of the temple of knowledge, and bid all that will, enter. We have no reserves, no concealments, no mysteries to be hidden from the vulgar eye or ear. And had the Church been always careful to fulfil her office as "the Light of the World" in the absence of "the True Light;" had the Churches been less zealous for precedence, less bitter in their contentions about externals, and more earnest and large-hearted in their labours for Christ and His pure Word, we should not hear in the present day so many

complaints of the decadence of pulpit power, and of ministers of the Gospel creeping slowly and reluctantly in the rear of the advancing world, when they ought to be marching in the van, pointing the way, and bearing aloft the banner of truth and holiness.

The following pages contain a very humble and inadequate attempt to expound the practical teaching of "CHRIST THE COUNSELLOR," with some reference and application to the circumstances of the age in which we live.

The volume contains the substance of a series of discourses on our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, which were delivered in the ordinary course of the writer's ministry. In the hope of making these expositions serviceable in the cause of pure and undefiled religion beyond the limited circle of a colonial congregation, they have been rewritten in a somewhat different form, and are now published. The writer desires humbly to place his labours at the foot of the Cross, and hopes for their success only in so far as they may be found faithfully to exhibit the teaching of "CHRIST THE COUNSELLOR." If he shall have at all succeeded in making it appear that in the counsels of Christ there is amply sufficient for the exigencies of man in every age, and that all the legitimate appetencies of our immortal being may be abundantly satisfied out of His divine and

human fulness, the object of the writer will have been attained.

In conclusion, the writer has to express his hope that, as it is impossible for him to give his final corrections to the work during its publication, any slight inaccuracy that may have escaped his notice in revising the MS. may be pardoned.

ST ANDREW'S MANSE, PARRAMATTA, N.S.W.
*October* 1, 1868.

"Alios omnes prophetas longè superavit, quantum typos superat antitypus, et umbras corpus; illi servi, Christus Filius, Doctor doctorum; illi externè tantum docebant, Christus internè legem inscribit in cordibus; illis Spiritus dabatur, sed ad mensuram; at ἀμετρῶς Christo datur. Spiritus quo animabantur prophetæ non erat spiritus prophetarum; at spiritus quo plenus Christus fuit spiritus Christi; prophetias non ex alio afflatu proferebat, sed ex Deitatis in ipso habitantis plenitudine; vitæ sanctimonia nulla labe contaminata fuit, et miracula suâ virtute patravit. Si arcana cordium aliquando prophetis, Deo revelante, nota erant, hoc rarò contingebat; at Deo Christo omnia patebant, nihilque ejus scientiam infinitum latebat."—THEOL. B. PICTETI, viii. 21.

# CHRIST THE COUNSELLOR.

## I.

## POVERTY IN SPIRIT.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."—MATT. v. 3.

OUR Lord's Sermon on the Mount has been always and justly esteemed as one of the most precious portions of the Word of God. Its value, indeed, can hardly be over-estimated; for though it does not contain a direct and formal enunciation of the saving truths of the Gospel, it does contain that which is necessary to the right apprehension of those truths. It demonstrates the exceeding breadth and spirituality of God's Law; and inferentially teaches man's utter inability to comprehend and obey it. The Sermon on the Mount convinces every man of sin, and condemns him before God; for God knows no mercy, save on the foundation of His Law fulfilled. But we are taught herein, that Christ came to fulfil that Law, which man had broken, and is wholly unable to keep. And thus our blessed Lord

makes the Law, as expounded by Him in this discourse, do its proper office of a schoolmaster, or child-leader, to bring us to Himself. Thus He sought to prepare the minds of those to whom He spake, and who, it must be remembered, were living under a legal dispensation, for the reception of the free and full salvation which He came to achieve, and which should afterwards be published to every creature under heaven.

The Sermon on the Mount contains a luminous and authoritative Exposition of the Whole Duty of Man. It teaches us, that the kingdom of God is a kingdom of holiness, and that without holiness no man can see the Lord. It teaches a pure and sublime morality, to which the most refined conceptions of heathen philosophers have made but distant and feeble approaches. It sets before us a standard of virtue, high indeed—so high that we cannot while we are in the flesh fully attain unto it—but which it is our duty humbly and perseveringly to strive after. A right study of this portion of the Divine testimony will satisfy us that Christianity is not merely a Creed, but also a Code; that no doctrinal teaching can be sound which does not tend to promote practical holiness; and that the only satisfactory evidence of a living union with Christ is a growing conformity to His image.

There is no doubt that the Sermon on the Mount was delivered soon after the commencement of our Lord's ministry. The Mount on which it was delivered was most probably a low eminence lying westward from the Sea of Galilee, to which the Crusaders gave the name of "The Mount of Beatitudes," by which it is still known to pilgrims, though the Moslem inhabitants of the country know it by the name of "The Horns of Hattîn," from the village of Hattîn at its base. The situation of

the hill, which "rises only sixty feet above the plain, so strikingly coincides with the intimations of the Gospel narrative, as almost to force the inference, that in this instance the eye of those who selected the spot was for once rightly guided."* As a general rule, however, no dependence is to be placed on the traditional identification of Scriptural localities; and there is reason to believe that this difficulty of identification is designed by God, for the purpose of restraining that idolatry of association, to which mankind has ever been prone.

The general scope of the Sermon on the Mount is sufficiently obvious. In some instances our Lord's meaning has been singularly misapprehended by expositors, as will appear in the proper places. But it is generally admitted, that our Lord intended,

FIRST, To teach His hearers wherein true Happiness consists;

SECONDLY, To expose and correct prevailing errors respecting the Moral Law;

THIRDLY, To inculcate sound principles concerning spiritual duties, and as to the difference between the Form and the Power of Godliness;

And LASTLY, To prepare the minds of men for the acknowledgment of His Messiahship, and for the believing reception of the Gospel of Salvation.

The most corrupt and licentious opinions prevailed in that day concerning the elements of happiness, and also concerning virtue, which philosophers of every school professed to regard as essential to happiness. It was only when they attempted to define virtue that the hollowness and selfish impurity of their theories became manifest. Nor were these vain but plausible speculations confined to the heathen. The Jews them-

* Stanley's "Sinai and Palestine," p. 369.

selves, who had received the Law by direct revelation, had grievously perverted it, making it void by their traditions, and evading its essential obligations.

And it is a striking illustration of that poverty of invention which has always been the characteristic of Error, that many of the most brilliant attempts that have been made by infidels, under various disguises, to overthrow the Divine authority of the Holy Scriptures —attempts which we find renewed with increased virulence in this Age of Progress—are in fact little more than a reproduction of the old sophistries of Athens and Jerusalem. Our blessed Lord has, in this discourse, furnished us with the means of refuting these gainsayers, and exposing their false philosophy and vain deceit, which, instead of meriting attention as new Codes discovered in the mine of Truth, are in reality nothing more than a revival of obsolete traditions, which found favour in a rudimentary age of mankind, but which certainly are not after the teaching of Christ (Col. ii. 8). We shall find that Divine Prophet teaching, in opposition to the latitudinarian theology of every age, that true happiness consists, not in self-indulgence, but in the conquest of self—not in the mere hearing of the Word of God, but in the doing of it; and that virtue consists, not in any outward course of action, but in the habitual and constraining motive and desire of the heart.

It is only necessary to add to these preliminary remarks, that the "disciples," to whom, it appears from ver. 1, the discourse was addressed, include, not the Apostles only, or those who had professed themselves Christ's followers, but the whole multitude who thronged to hear Him. The term "disciples" simply means *learners*, and denotes all those who came to Him, with a desire to be instructed.

The Sermon on the Mount commences with what are

commonly called "The Beatitudes"—an enumeration, that is to say, of NINE classes or characters of men, to whom the title of Blessed or Happy may with truth be applied. Happiness is the avowed, and it may be added, the *legitimate*, object, which every human being seeks to attain. But the majority of mankind fail to attain the object which all alike desire, because they seek for it where it cannot be found. Corrupt and debased by the Fall, man, with resolute perversity, ploughs the sandy shore in expectation of a crop of grain, and hews for himself wretched broken cisterns, which sad experience itself hardly convinces him will not hold water. God, in His infinite wisdom, left the mass of mankind for four thousand years feeling after Him, in the imperfect light of Reason and Conscience obscured by sin, if haply they might find the happiness they sought; but they found it not. Cicero and Seneca, the most illustrious moralists of the heathen world, have left many very eloquent treatises; and they, with others of that age, agree that happiness is to be found in virtue alone. Seneca, the preceptor of Nero, and the victim of his jealousy, in describing a happy man, characterises him in these terms: The happy man, saith he, is one "to whom nothing is good, and nothing evil, but a good and a bad disposition—whom no fortuitous circumstances can either elate or crush—who finds true pleasure in the contempt of pleasures—to whom virtue is the only good, and vice the only evil." Seneca was a contemporary of our Saviour, and his sentiments were no doubt very far in advance of the heathen society in which he flourished; but reading his moral precepts in the light of the Stoic philosophy, which he professed, how far do they fall short of the morality of Christ! To stifle human sympathies and emotions—to refuse either to weep or to rejoice—to look down superciliously upon all that con-

cerns our fellow-men—is not virtue in the proper sense of the term, but is rather the evidence of secret misanthropy, and the fruit of a distorted and depraved ambition. Diogenes, the founder of the Cynic School of Philosophy, to which the Stoic was the somewhat more refined successor, habitually went about clad in squalid garments. So attired, he entered the elegantly furnished apartments of Plato, the founder of the Academic School, exclaiming, "Thus I trample on the pride of Plato!" "Yes!" replied the latter, "and with greater pride!"

Unhappily, however, it is not the heathens alone that have failed in the great search after happiness. If we closely observe the lives of men, even in professedly Christian lands, and in these days of physical and intellectual refinement and religious privilege, we shall find that the great multitude are seeking happiness with a dimness of perception and a perversity of judgment as gross and fatal as the most ignorant heathen. Cast an eye over this list of Beatitudes—these characters which Christ enumerates as "Blessed"—and then say if the objects which men generally propose to themselves as likely, when attained, to secure their happiness, are not the very opposites of these? The Beatitudes here specified are in fact so contrary to the course of this world, and to all the maxims that men have ever held, and still hold, in estimation, that they have not inaptly been called "The Christian Paradoxes." Pride, pomp, luxury; rank, distinction, influence in the world; the gratification of the flesh, or of the fleshly mind; these are the things that men chiefly desire, because they imagine that in these happiness is to be found. And where the development of these desires is not restrained by education and wholesome laws, they lead to the indulgence of licentious and tyrannical passions,

which would ultimately banish mercy and peace from the earth, and extinguish, if it were possible, the lamp of Divine Truth itself. Such, it ought not to be concealed, is the real tendency of our corrupt propensities. There are in every human being the seeds of the most hideous vices; and it is only the restraining grace of God which in any case prevents the development of the seeds, and the production of a monster of wickedness. The human race progresses in knowledge, skill, and wealth; but the corrupt heart of the individual man is not changed; for "who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" And therefore, to men living in this nineteenth century, with all its boasted advancement of thought, it is just as necessary to offer instruction on the nature of true happiness, as it was to men in the days of our Lord's flesh.

Let us then reverently sit at the feet of our Divine COUNSELLOR, and hear His word.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven." In the parallel passage in S. Luke's Gospel, our Lord says, "Blessed be ye poor; for yours is the kingdom of God." And in order to apprehend aright our Lord's teaching, the two sentences must be taken together, and permitted to explain each other. It cannot be intended that they who are poor in worldly circumstances are "Blessed," simply *because they are poor;* still less, that the kingdom of heaven is in any exclusive, or even special, sense, the inheritance of the poor, *as poor.*

"God's poor man," saith Augustine, "is he that is poor in disposition, not he that is poor only in his wallet."* It is not they that are literally poor, therefore, but the "poor in spirit," that are described as 'Blessed," and heirs of the kingdom of God. A man

* Augustine on Ps. xxxiv. 6.

may be poor in this world's goods, and yet have a world of pride, ambition, envy, and all unrighteousness in his heart; while, on the other hand, a man may be largely endowed with wealth, and at the same time be "poor in spirit."

There is no merit, in short, in being rich or in being poor; and yet it ought not to be forgotten, that a state of comparative poverty is favourable to spiritual life and growth, and that a state of affluence is upon the whole unfavourable to the development of the highest Christian graces. "How hardly," saith our Lord—that is, "*with what difficulty*, shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" (Luke xviii. 24). Riches are proverbially uncertain and deceiving; and they that trust in them too frequently fall into temptations and snares, and become the victims of many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown them in destruction and perdition (1 Tim. vi. 9). To this danger the poor man is exposed in a much less degree. His wants, tastes, and habits are simple, and he is removed from many scenes and occasions of sin, which are most perilous, both to the body and to the soul. Many of the so-called luxuries of the rich would afford no enjoyment to one accustomed from childhood to plain diet and plain furniture; while, at the same time, the poor man is exempt from the grave responsibility inseparable from the possession of worldly wealth. The greatest amount of happiness, so far as the question of wealth is concerned, is doubtless to be found in a middle station; and every wise and godly man will echo the prayer of the pious Agur, "Give me neither poverty nor riches" (Prov. xxx. 8). Nevertheless, when God does see fit to keep any of His children in a state of poverty, it may afford them legitimate consolation to remember the Saviour's words, "Blessed be ye poor."

Yet the poor man must not forget that, to be truly blessed in the sense here intended, he must be "poor in spirit"—a character which has respect both to temporal and spiritual things. The poor man, to be poor in spirit, must be *contentedly* poor—not necessarily to the exclusion of any attempt to better his worldly condition, if God should give him opportunity,—but recognising and cheerfully submitting to the will of God, who putteth down one and setteth up another, as seemeth good to Him. For a poor man to be poor in spirit, he must acknowledge the wisdom of God in all His arrangements, and especially in appointing him to poverty; for though man cannot always see "the end of the Lord" (Jam. v. 11), yet God sees both the end and the beginning; and we are taught to believe that He doeth all things well, and that the condition in which He places every man is that which is best for him. If a poor man be really one of God's blessed poor, he will honestly believe this, and not merely profess it. He will bear his poverty lightly, submitting without murmur or complaint to the inconveniences and privations of his lot; and with a grateful appreciation of the many benefits he enjoys, he will resolve to look always at the bright side of everything, and find matter for gratitude and praise even in his sorest difficulties and trials.

On the other hand, the rich man must not forget, that he can only escape the peculiar dangers to which he is exposed by cultivating the disposition here commended. Let him not think highly of himself on account of his wealth. There is, in truth, nothing which gives a man so slender a claim to consideration as the mere possession of wealth.

It is a favourite maxim, often in the mouths of those who have heaped up riches, or who are panting

in the race after them, "Wealth gives power; and power always commands respect." But like most other worldly maxims, it is unsound. It may be true, that wealth gives power; but it is not the mere possession of power that commands real respect, but *the right exercise of power*. What respect is due to the man who keeps his wealth locked up in securities, or spends it only in the gratification of his own selfish lusts? What respect is due to the man who has the means of relieving the physical sufferings of humanity, and of aiding largely in the promotion of works of piety and benevolence, but who either holds aloof altogether, or contributes a sum which bears no proportion to his ability, and involves no sacrifice or self-denial? Such a man has yet to learn, that the power of wealth consists, not in possession, but in use: he has yet to learn, that what he fondly calls his own, is only lent to him, and that for the employment of it he will shortly be called to a strict account: he has yet to learn, that the poorest labourer, who faithfully serves God and loves his brother, is really a far more respectable man than he who boasts of untold riches, and yet denies or evades his responsibilities.

Let those, then, to whom God has given wealth, sit loose to it, not setting their affections on it, not feeling that they have any right to it, but remembering that He who has given has also the right to take away. Let them be faithful stewards of what God has committed to their hands, but ready to resign His gifts, should He see fit to resume them. Poverty in spirit is very lovely in those who are largely endowed with worldly riches. This is the very mind that was in Christ, who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor,—who, though He was in the form of God, yet made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him

the form of a servant. But what a wretched travesty of this voluntary poverty of the Lord Jesus is that of the religious orders in the Church of Rome, the members of which take vows of personal poverty, while, as communities, they grasp at the wealth and power of nations!

The man who is truly poor in spirit with respect to the things of this world, is one who, possessing wealth and influence, minds not high things, but condescends to men of low estate (Rom. xii. 16), sympathising with them, and helping them, as he would wish others to do to himself in similar circumstances. He regards his resources simply as means of doing good, and he forgets not "to do good and to communicate,"—being constrained thereto by the love of Christ, and not claiming any merit for distributing to God's creatures that which is not his own, but God's. Such poverty in spirit, even in a temporal aspect only, has great blessedness: it raises a man above the dust and strife, and the foul miasms of the world, and enables him to breathe a moral atmosphere, pure, clear, and balmy. Such a man will always be respected and beloved, because, having power, he uses it for the glory of God, and for the welfare of mankind.

But poverty in spirit has an aspect also to spiritual things. Thus regarded, it is almost equivalent to Christian Humility, which is so important an element of the Christian character, and enters so largely into all the other gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit. To be poor in spirit is to be "clothed with humility" (1 Peter v. 5)—to think humbly of ourselves, humbly of what we are, of what we have, and of what we do. It is, with all lowliness of mind, to esteem others better than ourselves, (Phil. ii. 3); to see others preferred before us—and this is often a very hard thing—without envying or repining;

it is to choose for ourselves, or to be willing to occupy, the lowest sphere; it is to feel that we are Christ's servants, and that the lowest rank in His service is above our deserts.

It is unnecessary to say, that such sentiments are not natural to man; nay, in the eyes of the world such sentiments are base and grovelling, and never were they more likely to be so esteemed than in the present age, when the appliances of pride and personal luxury are multiplied with unprecedented rapidity. In the view of the ungodly world, a poor-spirited man is one that keeps himself in the background, and does not push himself forward in the race after riches and honours. A man who is very scrupulous about soiling his hands with questionable gains, is often spoken of slightingly as "a poor-spirited fellow;" a man who would rather be poor all his days than suffer a sin upon his conscience, or take the wages of unrighteousness into his house, is often said to have "no spirit at all." Now, without encouraging the idea that a Christian is not at liberty to increase his worldly estate by lawful diligence in lawful business, which, on the contrary, is his bounden duty; and while disclaiming all sympathy with that mean, abject, crouching spirit, which is nothing but dishonourable indolence and indifference to decency and propriety—it must not be forgotten, that there is a point at which industry itself becomes worldly carefulness, and the desire for wealth degenerates into covetousness, which is idolatry (Col. iii. 5). That he may not overpass this boundary, the Christian has need to be sober, and watch unto prayer, trying himself, his motives, and his actions, by the perfect standard of God's Law. The man who holds back from profits or advantages which he cannot accept with clean hands and a pure heart, may be scoffed at for his poor-spirited scruples

by those whose consciences are more elastic; but it is he, after all, that displays the true wisdom which fears God, and the true courage which fears not man. This is Poverty-in-spirit, of which Christ says that it is "blessed." There is an essential distinction between being *poor in spirit*, and being *poor-spirited*. It is poverty *in* spirit, and not poverty *of* spirit, that our Lord commends.

But "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. ii. 14). There exists, no doubt, in the breasts of many unregenerate men, a sentiment of *honour*, which restrains them from certain sins, as being disreputable, unmanly, or, above all, ungentlemanly. An honourable man of the world will scorn a lie, or a fraud, or a petty political or commercial intrigue, because such things are base and sordid, and he will not lower himself even in his own eyes by stooping to them. This is Pride, in its most commendable form certainly, but still a mere natural sentiment, frequently found in men who have but a very feeble perception of religious principle. Though apparently, in some instances, leading to similar results, it is essentially different, both in its origin and in its character, from true Poverty-in-spirit, which is the fruit of the Holy Ghost, and the evidence of the operation of Divine grace, and of genuine spiritual life in the soul. True Poverty-in-spirit begins at the foot of the Cross. It begins with that renunciation of self, which is involved in the very profession of Christianity, and which consists, not merely in the relinquishment of certain carnal or worldly gratifications, but in the entire surrender of ourselves to Christ, the abnegation of our own righteousness, and the receiving and resting upon Him alone. There is

nothing to which the naturally proud and rebellious heart of man will not submit rather than to this. To acknowledge that Christ is ALL, and that of our own selves we can do NOTHING! This is too much for flesh and blood. It is the sovereign grace of God alone that is able to cast down our lofty and vain imaginings, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. x. 5). It is, in a word, only by the humble reception of salvation as a free gift from God, on account of the merits and sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ, that we can become truly "poor in spirit." Therefore the COUNSELLOR places this grace in the foreground, and announces, as the first lesson to be learned in the Gospel school, "Blessed are the poor in spirit!" The very first step to the exalted blessedness and glory of the saints, is Self-abasement! Shall it not, then, be esteemed a high privilege to submit to this teaching of Divine Wisdom? Shall it be thought grievous to be told, that, if we would reach the heights of heaven, we must begin by lying low in the dust? Shall we deem it a hard thing to come to Jesus, with our toils and our burdens, our weariness and our troubles, and seek from Him that rest and refreshment which He alone is able to give to the heavy-laden soul? Shall we not rather recognise it as the highest blessedness to take His yoke upon us, and learn of Him, who is meek and lowly in heart? For His yoke is easy, and His burden is light (Matt. xi. 29, 30).

"BLESSED are the poor in spirit!" Blessed, even in this life! It is for them that God careth: they are the little flock, whom the Good Shepherd of Israel makes to lie down in green pastures, and leads beside the waters of quietness. It is for them that the holy angels are sent forth to minister: it is for them that the Lord

Himself prepares a table in the wilderness, and in presence of their spiritual foes: it is upon their heads that the oil of gladness is poured forth: the cup of joy and peace which God makes to run over is theirs. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow them all the days of their lives, and they shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever!

Blessed are the poor in spirit! Not only in this life, but also in that which is to come; "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The kingdom of Grace is theirs: for "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble" (Jam. iv. 6). False prophets have sought to attract votaries to their lying vanities by promising them all manner of pomps, and splendours, and sensual pleasures. But Christ the Counsellor looks to them that are of a humble and contrite spirit, and declares that the kingdom of heaven is theirs. As He saith also in another place, "Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. xviii. 4). Grace in the soul is the bud, of which glory is the ripe and satisfying fruit. Humility and self-denial in this world—not voluntarily assumed, but the unostentatious offspring of justifying faith—are effectual preparations for the blessedness of the heavenly kingdom.

Let him, therefore, who desires to cultivate this gracious disposition, begin by assuring himself that he has been brought into living union with Christ. He is the Vine: believers are the Branches. The branch is of the same nature as the vine; and therefore, if we are really branches of Christ, that mind will be in us which was also in Him. God's Law was in His heart: His delight was to do the will of Him that sent Him: let it be so also with us! It was by treading the Valley of Humiliation that He achieved the kingdom: by the same

path let us follow Him to the same glorious consummation. It is by cultivating the temper that characterises the kingdom, that we become fitted for the enjoyment of it.

Finally, if we are assured of our personal interest in Christ, let us seek to bring forth fruit to the glory of Him whose right hand hath planted us. It was a just complaint against Israel of old, that they were as an empty vine, which brought forth fruit unto *itself* (Hos. x. 1). Is it not so with many professing Christians? Alas! this is not being poor in spirit! We must be willing to labour, to spend and be spent, and then to say, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory!" True humility is essentially laborious, and therefore productive. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit: so shall ye be my disciples" (John xv. 8). True humility is essentially large-hearted: it is kind, even to the unthankful and the evil; and lends, hoping for nothing again (Luke vi. 35). True humility brings the soul into its proper attitude before God: it begets confidence in Him; and leads to the enjoyment of hope and love in communion with Him. It enables the soul to participate in all the consolations of the Spirit; and thus makes us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

## II.

## THE BLESSED MOURNERS.

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."—MATT. v. 4.

OUR Lord's design, in this enumeration of Beatitudes, with which the Sermon on the Mount opens, seems to have been to teach His disciples, that true Happiness, or Blessedness, consists, not in outward circumstances, but in states of mind; not in condition of life, but in character; not in what is merely physical, and therefore imperfect and transitory, but in what is moral and spiritual, and therefore in its very nature permanent. Hence, the characters or spiritual states which He pronounces truly happy, are the very opposites of those usually accounted such by the children of this world. The world calls the *proud* happy; but He who is "the Power of God and the Wisdom of God" declares, that "Blessed are the poor in spirit;" for theirs is a better portion than the wealth and grandeur that minister to earthly pride: "theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

The Beatitude now before us is another spiritual paradox, in which the truth of God is contrasted with the plausible fallacy of man. The world's verdict is, "Blessed are they that rejoice!" Blessed are the merry-makers, who laugh, and dance, and sing; who

pass their lives in a round of gaiety and frivolity, and "hold it one of the wisest things to drive dull care away." But this Teacher sent from God declares the contrary: "Blessed," saith He, "are they that MOURN."

Our blessed Lord did not, of course, mean to assert, that *mourning is in itself a blessed thing*, or a thing to be desired for its own sake. This would be a mere absurdity, contrary to both reason and experience. No affliction is for the present joyous, but grievous. It is not a pleasant thing to have a limb cut off, to lose a friend or relative, or to be deprived of worldly wealth; nor is the mourning which necessarily accompanies such calamities in itself a blessed thing. Pain cannot but be regarded as an evil, notwithstanding the sophistries of those who would exalt Natural Religion into the place of Revelation, and who have attempted to reconcile the fact, that evil exists in the world with the Divine Benevolence, by arguing that the evil that exists is not evil, because it is more than counterbalanced by the existing good, and because the evil itself is productive of good. The argument is utterly fallacious, and the assumptions on which it rests utterly untrue. But were they true, they would not demonstrate the Divine Benevolence, for surely that must be a very imperfect Benevolence which effects its designs by painful and destructive agencies. And, in a word, Natural Religion gives no satisfactory explanation of the discords and inconsistencies which appear in this world, *as it now is:* it is to the Word of God that we are compelled to go for a solution of the mystery. There we find, that the evil that is in the world is the consequence of SIN; a discovery in which a well-balanced mind will not find cause for satisfaction, but rather for humiliation and mourning; and these are certainly not *in themselves* blessed things, how-

ever they may afterwards by Divine grace be made to produce blessed results.

It may also be taken for granted, that our Lord did not mean to assert that *a sour, cynical, melancholy spirit is blessed.* He did not intend to teach that rejoicing, on suitable occasions, was either unlawful or unbecoming. He Himself both rejoiced with them that did rejoice, and wept with them that wept. So far from refusing to countenance by His presence scenes of mirth and gladness, we find Him promoting the festivities of a marriage, and frequently accepting the hospitalities of the wealthy, as well as sharing the humbler provision of the poor. He ate and drank, both with Pharisees and with publicans and sinners, not because the society of either class was congenial to His holy nature, but because it was part of His mission to show His sympathy with human joys and sorrows, and to teach that true religion is intended to sanctify, and not to suppress, the kindly intercourse of man with man. The supercilious and exclusive Pharisee railed against Him as "a man gluttonous and a wine-bibber," because He sat at meat with sinners, and suffered a penitent woman of the city to anoint His feet. But He taught that, as there were occasions which called forth demonstrations of joy even from the blest inhabitants of heaven, so there were on earth also times when it was wont to kill the fatted calf, and to make merry and be glad; not indeed as this world counts merriment and gladness—not with those "vain deluding joys" which an illustrious Christian poet has truly characterised as "The brood of folly without father bred;" but with holy mirth, such as becomes those who know themselves to be sinners restored to God's favour—who know that, in their case, the banished has been brought back, the lost found, and the dead raised to life.

Neither did our Lord intend, that *mere natural sorrow*, that is, the sorrow of the natural man, *is blessed.* It is, on the contrary, the very enemy of blessedness. Unregenerate men, under the pressure of earthly losses, or bereavements, or bodily sufferings, frequently fall into a desponding, disconsolate state, which is neither more nor less than rebellion against God. Sometimes, it is true, they appear to receive afflictions with callous indifference, or plunge recklessly into excesses, in order to stupify their sensibilities, and drown their sorrows in oblivion. But others, too proud thus to degrade themselves, nevertheless suffer their grief to gain the mastery over them: they murmur against the Divine Will, and refuse to see either justice or mercy in His dealings. Even believers are sometimes so hardly bestead in the great fight of afflictions which their Master calls them to endure, that they are tempted to sinful murmurs, to refuse all consolation, and perhaps to throw down their shield and sword in despair. They that mourn after this sort are not blessed. Such is that "sorrow of the world which worketh death" (2 Cor. vii. 10).

And, once more, *that mourning must be excepted, which, though it professes to be on account of sin, proceeds from an unrenewed heart.* Such mourning is not really on account of sin, but on account of its consequences. Or, it is merely that assumption of the outward signs of mourning, when there is no real contrition of heart, which is so frequently condemned in the Word of God. The prophet Isaiah reproved those who bowed their heads like bulrushes, and spread sackcloth and ashes under them (Isa. lviii. 5), as if these outward emblems of humiliation could be acceptable in the sight of God as a substitute for true repentance. And our Lord Himself, in this very discourse, rebukes the hypocrites, who assumed a sad countenance, and disfigured their

faces, that they might appear unto men to fast (vi. 16). Nor must it be forgotten, that mourning, even for sin, so far from being blessed, is most accursed, when it leads men to despair of God's mercy, and to doubt His willingness to save him that cometh, though his sins be red like crimson. There were sinners of old time in Israel who mourned for sins, which yet they would not forsake, and who cried, "There is no hope: no; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go" (Jer. ii. 25). Judas mourned for his sin, but not after a godly sort: he is "the son of perdition" (John xvii. 12). Many have thought themselves very humble because they despaired; but in truth they were rejecting Christ, who came into the world to save sinners, even the chief (1 Tim. i. 15).

It is time, then, to ask, Who *are* the mourners here called "Blessed?"

Among them are *those to whom the afflictions of this life are sanctified;* who sorrow, indeed, but not as others that have no hope. They are not callous to suffering: the fountain of their tears is not dried up; but their gracious Lord has showed them a tree, which they have cast into the waters of Marah, and have thus taken away their bitterness. They have brought their griefs to the foot of the Cross, and from Him who, for their sakes, was hanged on a tree, they have learned to endure, and to be happy in their endurance. They have learned the vanity and insufficiency of all earthly things, and their affection is no longer set upon them. They neither have, nor pretend to have, a stoical insensibility to pain and sorrow; but they have, what is far better and nobler, a spirit of heroic fortitude and resignation, the offspring of their relationship to God, which enables them to recognise even in the severest chastisements a

Father's hand, dealing with them, not for His pleasure, but for their profit. They are thus weaned from the bosom of their natural parents, the world and the flesh, and are made partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust, and the Spirit bearing witness with their spirit that they are children of God. Sweet, indeed, unto such mourners, are the uses of adversity!

Those also are blessed *who mourn for sin with a godly sorrow.* It has been said, that *all* mourning for sin is *not* blessed. Frequently it springs from the mere temporal consequences of a sinful life; as when a man, by the indulgence of carnal or worldly lusts, has wasted his substance, impaired his health, sacrificed his good name, brought the grey hairs of his parents with sorrow to the grave, or reduced a wife and his helpless babes to shame and poverty. It is no matter for astonishment that men should feel such consequences most acutely, and fancy themselves, and persuade others, that they are truly penitent. The friends of such men frequently and willingly believe the repentance to be genuine, and stretch forth the hand of sympathy and succour; but too often, when the pressure of suffering has been removed, the old evil propensities, so far from having been crucified in the heart of the prodigal, have resumed their sway with even greater virulence than before. Or, if there have been no friends thus to help the victim of his own passions, the absence of all truly gracious affections from the soul has been sometimes deplorably demonstrated by a still more reckless plunging into the slough of uncleanness, until a suicide's or a profligate's grave has closed the miserable history.

Then there are others, who, under the pressure of conscience, after years spent in the service of sin, have shut themselves out from the world in a misanthropical

spirit, and sought to atone for their former excesses by voluntary mortifications and privations. This is not godly sorrow; nor does it contain the smallest element of blessedness.

"Godly sorrow" for sin "worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of." It leads to a deep *hatred of sin*, as that evil and abominable thing which God hateth. It brings the sinner, under a profound sense of his own guilt and unworthiness, to reject all confidence in himself, to cast aside all pleas and excuses, to acknowledge himself altogether vile and polluted in God's sight, meriting nothing but wrath and condemnation: it leads him to abhor himself, and to repent in dust and ashes: it leads him to cry, "What shall I do to be saved?" Then, but not till then, is he in a fit state for apprehending the Gospel message. So long as a man has any confidence in himself, or in anything outward, formal, or ceremonial, Christ can profit him nothing.* HE will be a whole Saviour, or none at all. He will not come in as a make-weight to supply what is lacking in our obedience; for the most advanced believer has no obedience on which the pure eyes of God can look as possessing any merit whatever. So long, therefore, as a man thinks that he can do anything *meritoriously* for his own salvation, he deceiveth himself, and cannot be saved. He must be brought to feel his own utter nothingness and worthlessness, and cast himself at the foot of the Cross with whole and implicit faith, or he stops short of salvation. His repentance needs to be repented of: he must begin again. But if he has been led, in the depth of godly sorrow, to touch only the hem of Christ's garment in a spirit of absolute self-renunciation, his faith will save him: he shall be made perfectly whole: immediately his leprosy shall be

* Consult Gal. v. 2–6; Phil. iii. 2–7; Col. ii. 8–23.

cleansed. The fetters will fall from his limbs, and he will walk in the light as Christ's freedman. And in the strength of this new life which he has received, he will bring forth fruit: he will exhibit a new and a true obedience, for to this also is he called; and God, who has begun a good work in him, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. i. 6). Blessed, thrice blessed, are they who have thus looked upon Him whom they have pierced, and mourned!

To proceed: it is a blessed thing also *when the believer mourns for the sins of the world around him.* Believers themselves, not to speak of mere nominal Christians, are too apt to regard with indifference the mass of ungodliness that is in the world: the abounding of iniquity on every side, instead of kindling their zeal, causes their love to wax cold. This apathy may be, and frequently is, the result of a feeling of helplessness; but even if it were in every case true that nothing could be done, or attempted, it should be remembered, that God's people are set for the defence of His truth and of His law; and that, in answer to earnest and persevering prayer, He has frequently opened up ways of access to the souls of men, when none had been apparent. But, be the way plain or not, the sincere and zealous believer, if the fire of the altar has been at all kept alive in his heart, will feel his spirit stirred within him, as Paul's was at Athens, when he sees mankind, including many members of the visible church, given to idolatry —to covetousness, the most debasing form of idolatry— to fleshly lusts, that degrade man, and dishonour God— to worldly ambition, pomp, and vanity, which beguile so many of the sons and daughters of men into the jaws of the destroyer. A man of God is prompted to rush into the midst of the giddy, selfish multitude, and cry aloud, "Sirs, why do ye these things? Turn from these

vanities, and serve the living God" (Acts xiv. 15). Rivers of water run down his eyes, because men forsake the law of God; his soul melteth with heaviness, for "the wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted" (Ps. xii. 8). And he will not content himself with mourning over the sins of others: he will be ready, as God shall give him means and opportunity, for which he will watch and pray, to give active assistance in stemming the torrent of wickedness, and in bringing the gracious messages of God's Word to bear upon the hearts and consciences of sinners, if haply they may be brought unto repentance, and to the acknowledging of the truth.

It is blessed also *to mourn in sympathy with the sorrows of others.* The tear of genuine sympathy is a mark of a chastened and a sanctified soul. Such a soul knows, by experience, that "it is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting" (Eccl. vii. 2). There is no doubt a kind of sympathy common in this world, which is a mere natural emotion, and has no higher source than the dislike which most men have to witnessing or hearing of suffering. This spurious sentimentality often prompts men to deeds of generosity, which are highly applauded, and for which the doers are too ready to accept applause, without examining themselves as to their motives. True Christian sympathy is of a higher order; for it springs from a higher source —the love of Christ, and the desire to be conformed to His image. Of Him it is recorded, that He often wept; but that not once did He weep for Himself. He wept with the sisters of Lazarus over the grave of His friend whom He loved! He had compassion upon the multitudes that followed Him, because they had no bread! He mourned with the poor widow that mourned for her only son! Nor was His sympathy confined to words

or tears. He not only sorrowed for the sorrows of others, but He healed their sorrows. His miracles were almost exclusively benevolent, directly removing some human affliction, or supplying some human want. True Christian sympathy is likewise an active principle; not a mere impulse, but holy tenderness and liberality, tempered with wisdom; a desire not to scatter blindly and promiscuously, but to do good effectually and permanently.

To mention no more: *those are blessed mourners who mourn for the defections and distractions of Zion.* It is written, that the Lord commanded a mark to be set on the foreheads of those that *sighed and cried* for the abominations that were done *in the midst of Jerusalem*, that they might be spared when the sentence should go forth to smite, and not spare (Ezek. ix. 4, 5). The Lord Jesus Himself wept over the guilty and doomed city which was red with the blood of the prophets. Paul records, even with weeping, that many walked then, as also they do at this day, in the fellowship of Christ's people, who are nevertheless enemies of the Cross of Christ (Phil. iii. 18). And is it possible for any man, who loves the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, to behold the inconsistencies and lapses of many that profess and call themselves Christians, to call to mind his own unfaithfulness and backslidings, or to look upon the distracted state of the Church—the champions of Israel making sport for the Philistines by bruising and mauling one another—thieves and hirelings usurping the functions of the shepherd, and leaving the flock to the wolf, while they are wrangling about the fleece—is it possible for any faithful servant of God to look upon this without mourning? Surely this is a lawful cause for mourning! Surely blessed are they that weep, like Jeremiah, over the hurts of the Lord's people!—who behold with anguish of soul, like faithful Nehemiah, the

walls of Jerusalem broken down, and her gates consumed with fire; and who not only mourn, but are also led to exclaim, with that true Christian patriot, "Come, and let us build up the walls of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach" (Neh. ii. 13, 17).

Such are the mourners whom our blessed Lord and Divine COUNSELLOR calls "blessed." The question now occurs, *In what respects are they blessed? Wherein does their blessedness consist?*

And it may be answered, They are blessed, *because they only know what true joy is.* The mirth and laughter of this world are but a mask which covers an aching heart. The wise man, when he had tasted every earthly pleasure, and drained the cup of earthly joy to its dregs, recorded it as his final judgment, the result of his life-long experience, that "sorrow is better than laughter;" that "the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth." "I said in my heart"—such is the testimony of Solomon—"Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure; and behold, this also is vanity. I said of laughter, It is mad; and of mirth, What doeth it?" The laughter of the fool, that is, of the thoughtless ungodly man of this world, is compared by the same inspired Preacher to "the crackling of thorns under a pot"—a bright, fierce, momentary blaze, succeeded by coldness and darkness more intense than before. Surely "this also is vanity!" But they that mourn after a gracious sort are truly blessed, for their very sorrows lead them to the fountain of all joy and peace. A well-spring of happiness breaks forth in their souls, and enables them to glory in the hottest fires of tribulation; for they know that tribulation produceth patience; that patience enlarges their experience of Divine things, and

teaches them the gracious end of the Lord in all their afflictions; and that this blessed experience is fitted to kindle anew and sustain their hope—a hope which can never make them ashamed, or end in disappointment, because they have precious evidence of their final triumph in the love of God shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost which He hath given them (Rom. v. 3–5). This is the Divine Life—the Life of Faith! This is the kingdom of God—the reign of Grace in the heart of the believer—that kingdom of which we are taught that it is not meat and drink; but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost! (Rom. xiv. 17). Now, indeed, for a season, since God sees it to be needful for us, we are in heaviness through manifold temptations; but in all these things the believer is more than a conqueror, and in the exercise of faith and hope is enabled to rejoice, with joy unspeakable and full of glory (1 Peter i. 6–8).

Christian mourners are blessed, also, because this joyous solemnity, this holy serenity, of soul, which the volatile children of this world mistake for insensibility and gloom, is, in reality, the fruit of "precious faith," an evidence of a living union with Christ, and forms a most effectual safeguard against temptation. The Christian mourner has within him springs of joy of which the world knoweth not—"joy and peace in believing," (Rom. xv. 13)—which are to him as a spiritual panoply against the assaults of the world, the flesh, and the devil—assaults from which he can never be wholly exempt, so long as he dwells in an earthly tabernacle, exposed to the fiery darts of a subtle and malignant adversary, who lieth in wait to seize and devour. Close observers of human nature have remarked that persons of a lively cheerful temperament, while possessing the keenest sensibilities, are much less frequently deceived by false pretensions,

than the more austere and reserved. So also in spiritual things, it is a truth, amply demonstrated by experience, that the more joyful a man's religion is—and that is only another way of saying, the more real a man's religion is—the less likely is he to be blinded by those delusions which Satan so ingeniously contrives, and by which he beguiles so many to their ruin. The victims of religious imposture and superstition are almost invariably persons of a melancholy disposition, and of limited intellectual capacity. There is no greater mistake than to suppose that bright, joyous, happy persons, are necessarily either frivolous or fickle-minded: the reverse is more frequently true. The true Christian mourner is not a melancholy man, but one who rejoices in the Lord; and such a man almost instinctively penetrates the flimsy disguises with which fanaticism clothes its errors and extravagances. The man in whom dwells that chastened and pure joy which is the offspring of the Word of truth, will rarely be surprised, either into a grave doctrinal error, or into a moral delinquency. He has usually a well-balanced mind, and is able to estimate men and things at their true value; he is not, therefore, easily drawn aside from the right path by worldly allurements, or betrayed into sinful compliances and entanglements.

Chiefly, however, is the Christian mourner blessed, because *in him is that mind which was also in Christ.* The end whereunto the believer is called, the crown for which he strives, the hope which enables him to run with patience the race set before him, is that he may be conformed to the image of God's Son. The blessedness of heaven itself is to be like Him. "We know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John iii. 2). He, therefore, that would be like Him *then*, must strive to be like Him *now*. He

that would reign with Him hereafter, must suffer with Him here, cultivating an enlarged and enlightened sympathy with all the travail of the Saviour's soul. In the days of His flesh He was pre-eminently "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief:" so also must His people be. Not ascetics; not haters of men; not affecting to despise human things; but subdued, serious, sober-minded; pure, holy, grave; not too proud to share the sorrows or joys of their fellow-men; but mourning, as Jesus mourned, over the ruins effected by sin; yet withal rejoicing, because "there is a good time coming," when the desolate land shall be tilled and sown, when the wastes shall be fenced, and the ruined cities shall be inhabited (Ezek. xxxvi. 33–35).

This leads to the consideration of the special promise which our Lord sets forth for the encouragement of all that mourn in Zion: "they shall be comforted."

This promise is not to be regarded as exclusively applicable to the future life: it has its fulfilment, to a certain extent, even in the life that now is. Gracious mourners are comforted, even in the lowest depths of their sorrow, by the purifying of their souls, and the daily strengthening of their faith. This is the very end of all the afflictions which the Lord sends upon His people—that they may be made partakers of His holiness. Sanctified affliction, however grievous it may be to flesh and blood, afterwards "yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Heb. xii. 11). And more especially does this promise apply to them that truly mourn for sin. To them the Gospel opens the true source of comfort: not like the nostrums of Superstition, which heal men's hurts slightly, saying, Peace, Peace, when there is no peace; but rather like the good Samaritan, pouring oil and

wine into the wounded soul, and bringing the sinner, cleansed from his sins, into fellowship with God.

Nevertheless, it is doubtless to the future life that we must look for the complete realisation of this glorious promise. The treasury, from which all the believer's joy and comfort in this life can alone be drawn, is that Eternal Life which is the gift of God through Jesus Christ His Son. In God's presence there is fulness of joy: at His right hand, where sits the glorified Redeemer, there are pleasures for evermore. *This* is the comfort, the "strong consolation," to which the believer looks. This was the joy set before Jesus Himself, when He mourned in the valley of humiliation, and "offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears" (Heb. 5–7). This was His comfort, when He endured the cross, despising the shame; when He endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself; when he that had eaten bread with Him lifted up his heel against Him. This was the strength which the Angel brought Him in dark Gethsemane, when the bitter cup was put to His lips, and might not pass from Him except He drank it. His prayer was heard and answered, not by the removal of the cup, but by the infusion of joy into His soul, which enabled Him to triumph over the infirmity of the flesh, and to say, "Thy will be done!" Let His believing and waiting people consider Him that thus mourned and endured, lest they become weary and faint in their minds (Heb. xii. 3). Let them endure, as seeing Him who is invisible (Heb. xi. 27).

But, alas! how many are to be found, even among those who are called Christians, who have no experimental knowledge, either of the blessed mourning, or the blessed comfort of which Christ speaks! How many, whose joys are entirely of this world! Alas! poor

merry-makers of the passing hour! Think ye, as ye flutter like moths in the sunbeam, that the sun will shine for ever? Think ye, that clouds and storms will never appear above your horizon—that the rains will never descend—the floods never come? Ye know, for conscience will not let you utterly forget it, that there is a dark night coming, in which all your day-dreams shall vanish, and the loudest shouts of revelry shall be hushed in the stillness of the grave. In that awful hour of darkness and desolation, where shall ye look for comfort? Ye shall look in vain. Ye shall call, but there will be no answer. Then shall ye know what that meaneth, "Woe unto you that laugh now; for ye shall mourn and weep" (Luke vi. 25). But not so with him that is found united to Christ, and anchored within the veil. Blessed are ye that mourn as Christ mourned, for ye shall be comforted! Ye weep and lament now, while the world rejoices; and ye have cause for lamentation, for the Bridegroom, He whom your souls love, is absent; but withal ye have joy mingled with your mourning, for ye know that He will see you again, and that your joy shall then be full—joy which no man taketh from you, and with which a stranger doth not intermeddle. They that thus sow in tears shall assuredly reap in joy. They must indeed pass through the valley of Baca, on their way to the heavenly Zion; but even in that vale of sorrow, if they dig their wells, the rain of God will fill the pools; and so at length they shall appear before God, in that blest abode of peace and love, where there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor sighing; but "the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Rev. vii. 17).

## III.

## BLESSED MEEKNESS.

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth."—MATT. v. 5.

IN this, the third Beatitude, our blessed Lord announces a sentiment not less paradoxical than the two that have preceded it.

The wisdom of this world penetrates little below the surface, and regards as foolishness those deep things of God, which the Holy Spirit searcheth, and revealeth unto babes in Christ. The natural man has a very slender appreciation of what is past, distant, and future, and looks for happiness to what is present, visible, and tangible—desiring large possessions, exalted station, extensive influence, and other such things of this world as may be suited to his individual tastes. To such a one the promise, "that he should be the heir of the world," would appear very magnificent and attractive, if he saw any prospect of its realization. But the character to which our Lord here assigns this promise is one with which the unregenerate man of this world has no sympathy. He is quite unable to comprehend how an inheritance of universal dominion, which in his mind has always been associated with bloodshed and conquest, or at best with the crafty devices of a carnal policy, should ever be the lot of

those whom he regards as mean and contemptible. The world bestows its applause on the smart, pushing man, who successfully struggles or schemes for the mastery, and jostles or insinuates himself into the seat to which he has aspired. Ambition and revenge are passions deeply rooted in the human heart; and they who are not to some extent animated by these passions, so far from being considered happy by the unreflecting crowd, are despised and trampled upon.

But CHRIST THE COUNSELLOR, the great Prophet of His Church, the Light of the World, full of grace and truth, teaches His disciples to correct the partial and short-sighted judgments of men. "Blessed," saith He, "are the MEEK!"

The character here specified, Christian Meekness, there is reason to fear, is very imperfectly understood. What the world calls meekness is very far removed from that character to which the term is properly applied, and which can alone be rightly described as "blessed."

Some men, for example, are constitutionally quiet and patient—it would be more correct to say indolent—and are well content to let things take their own course. They possess what physiologists call a lymphatic or phlegmatic temperament: their blood courses sluggishly in their veins: their animal spirits are weak and languid: their brain, consequently, inactive: their imagination almost wholly dormant. They are incapable of either elevated desires or comprehensive designs: the conceptions and fruits of genius are not to be sought from them; they are strangers to those gusts of passion which raise most of the storms of life. Such men very frequently thrive in the world: their dull plodding perseverance fills their barns by the slow process of

accumulation, while more energetic spirits strive to achieve the same end by some brilliant speculation, and too generally fail.

There are others, who, though not perhaps deficient in activity and energy, are constitutionally timid and diffident, having little courage, and less fortitude. Such men are the tools with which bolder spirits work; they are made for service, and not for command; and when they happen to be placed in situations of power and authority, they are not unfrequently governed by their own subordinates and dependents. In ordinary life, these men are the admirers, or partisans, of that leader, whether in politics or in religion, who may happen to be the most popular, and whom they follow and applaud, not because they have examined the doctrines he propounds, and the measures he proposes, and satisfied themselves that they are sound and wise, but because they are naturally impressible and submissive, and are afraid of being found in a minority—because their feeble, parasitical minds are incapable either of manly resolve or independent action. Men of this stamp rarely thrive in the world: they are so deficient in all that constitutes character, that they are alike disqualified, either for maintaining a high station, or gracing a humble one.

The constitutional indolence and pliancy of disposition just described are frequently mistaken for meekness. Ungodly men are often found with these dispositions; and it is not too much to say, that such spurious meekness is as fruitful a parent of vice and crime as rashness and impetuosity. The man who is too indolent to resist, or too obsequious to refuse, the solicitations of others, will very soon find himself a partaker of other men's sins. They who have neither the vigour nor the boldness which belongs to principals in guilt, are thus frequently made accessories to, and accomplices

in, the guilt of more daring criminals. Thousands of promising young men and women are, every year, simply from want of decision of character—simply because they find it impossible to say "No!"—drawn into sinful compliances, and thus enter upon a downward course, too frequently terminating in delinquency and degradation, from which recovery in this world is seldom possible. Would that the sad disclosures, which almost every newspaper forces upon public attention, might teach the young to beware of that pliancy of temper, which so many think amiable, but which is more commonly the product of indifference and culpable weakness! "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not;" "for the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them" (Prov. i. 10, 32).

These passive and facile tempers are, however, by no means confined to the ranks of the unregenerate. They are found, more frequently than might be expected, among the believing children of God, and must be regarded as radical defects in their character. Grace modifies and subdues the peculiarities of individual men, but does not altogether destroy them; and hence, when a man of lethargic, irresolute temperament becomes the subject of Divine grace—for this thing, though it be hard, yet is not impossible with God—we expect to find, and in actual experience we do find, that his progress in the Divine life is slow and almost inappreciable; the cause of which is simply his own want of firmness in resisting the approaches of Satan.

That which hinders the spiritual progress of individuals, is also the fruitful source of strife and disorder in families and in the Church. Parents and office-bearers are too fond of considering what is easy and temporarily expedient, and have too little disposition to do

the thing that is right because it *is* right; hence there is a lamentable want of consistency and firmness, both in the maintenance of high-toned principle, and in the exercise of just and necessary discipline. The end of this unhappy laxity, which they who are most guilty of it call by much milder names, is insubordination, alienation, schism, rupture, confusion, and every evil work. Recal the sad history of Eli, a pious man, a righteous judge, but whose personal character lacked firmness. His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. He probably supposed himself to be meek and gentle, whereas he was simply weak and supine, and therefore wrath came upon his house (1 Sam. ii. 12–36). Jehoshaphat also was a godly man, and in his kingly office he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord; yet he also was deficient in firmness. He suffered his son Jehoram to take to wife Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, and he went in person with Ahab to Ramoth-Gilead against the Syrians. Probably he deceived himself by supposing that in yielding to the solicitations of Ahab he was acting in a meek and conciliatory spirit; but, in fact, he was guilty of culpable compliance with idolators, and brought upon himself the rebuke, "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord" (2 Chron. xviii. 1; xix. 2).

Christian meekness is essentially distinct from either indolence, indifference, or sinful conformity. The meekness which our Lord pronounces "blessed," has nothing in it of meanness or cowardice. It does not abjectly submit to insult, indignity, or injustice, without proper remonstrance; still less will it surrender or compromise a principle, either to win a smile, or to avert a frown. It is by no means inconsistent with a spirit of meekness

to assert and vindicate our rights, as citizens, or as members of the visible Church, provided this be done for the sake of the principle involved, and not from feelings of wrath or revenge. The Lord Jesus Himself asserted His rights as a free-born Israelite, when He said to the officer that smote him contemptuously, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?" (John xviii. 23). S. Paul, also, asserted his rights as a Roman citizen, when he had been unjustly scourged by order of the magistrates at Philippi, and again when threatened with the same cruelty by the Roman commandant at Jerusalem.* It is recorded concerning Moses, that he "was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num. xii. 3). Yet neither could worldly ambition draw him into sinful compliances with the idolatry of Egypt, nor the fear of shame induce him to forget his brethren in their affliction. He esteemed "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Heb. xi. 26).

From a careful examination of the teaching of God's Word, and the examples which it sets before us for our imitation, it may be gathered, that Christian meekness consists in these FOUR things:—Submission to God; Forbearance; Forgiveness; and Steadfastness *in* and *for* the Truth.

The FIRST element of Christian meekness is ENTIRE SUBMISSION TO GOD. Without this, there can be no Christian character at all. Submission to God lies at the very threshold of true religion. Naturally we are rebels against God, being born in the camp of the aliens; and our allegiance, so soon as we are capable of voluntary and responsible action, is given to the insurgent

* Acts xvi. 37; xxii. 25.

chief, the god of this world, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. Before we are capable, therefore, of any one gracious affection, the natural rebelliousness of our hearts must be subdued, and our whole attitude towards God changed. We must be brought to believe and confess that God, as our Creator and Preserver, has an absolute right to our entire and unquestioning obedience. Such obedience, we cannot but acknowledge, we have not rendered; we have therefore fallen under the righteous sentence of His wrath, from which of ourselves we cannot escape. And, knowing and feeling our guilt and helplessness, we are constrained to cast ourselves wholly on God's mercy, and submit to His good pleasure. In war, they who are vanquished, and have neither means of resistance nor hope of deliverance, are compelled to surrender at discretion, and are not permitted to make terms. This unconditional surrender is precisely what God requires of every man, as the evidence of true repentance and faith in his gracious promises through Christ. This is the very beginning of the work of grace in the soul. He that thus submits to God commits the keeping of his soul to Him as to a faithful Creator; he regards every event that happens to him as a messenger declaring the will of God; and he believes that all things work together for his good, both here and hereafter.

This elementary principle of Submission to God develops itself, under the culture of the Holy Spirit, into the maturer graces of the Christian character.

It produces FORBEARANCE and FORGIVENESS. The meek man is "slow to wrath," and "is not easily provoked." He bears and forbears. He speaks and acts in a peaceable spirit; being careful to give no offence to others, and very slow to take offence from others. There are those in every rank of life, and in every pro-

fession, who seem to watch every word and action of those around them, and are ready to seize upon the slightest pretext for displeasure — captious, irritable, irascible persons, who make a man an offender for a word, however carelessly uttered, which appears in the slightest degree to reflect upon them. The meek man, on the contrary, inclines to put the best construction on what is said or done, and does not hastily take to himself what was not intended to be applied to him. Little insults fail to rouse him to anger; and even great provocations, where there has been a manifest intention to irritate and wound, do not produce any lasting disturbance of his equanimity; he is able to control and pacify himself, and suffers not the sun to go down upon his wrath. He knows the power of "a soft answer" (Prov. xv. 1); and therefore replies meekly and mildly to those that bring railing accusations. It may be urged, that such a temper only exposes a man to the attacks of the rude and violent, and actually invites insult. But experience proves the contrary. A forbearing disposition is an evidence of real superiority on the part of its possessor, which never fails to command respect. It shows that he acts from principle, and not from impulse, and this always gives weight to character. According to what men of the world call "the code of honour," indeed, not to resent an insult is both pitiful and contemptible. But the wisdom which framed that code is certainly not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish (Jam. iii. 15). To restrain resentment is both noble and honourable: it is an evidence of a truly generous soul—of a heart subdued before God, deeply and painfully sensible of its own shortcomings, and of sins which have provoked the long-suffering patience of our heavenly Father. The feeling that actuates such a man prompts him to say within himself, "If God, whom

I have so often and so grievously offended, nevertheless bears with me, how much more should I bear patiently the far lighter provocations of my fellow-men!" Such a sentiment is not pusillanimous: it is the very breathing of the Spirit of God.

To Forbearance, however, must be added FORGIVENESS. The meek man is not less sensible of insults and injuries than other men; but when they affect himself only, he is ready to forgive and forget. Revenge is a passion which can have no abiding-place in a Christian breast: it may sweep over the surface, like a black squall, and cause a slight surge and ripple, but it does not stir up the depths. "Vengeance is mine: I will repay;" saith the Lord. The Christian remembers this; and the memory of it is like oil poured upon the billows. He seems to hear the voice of the Lord rebuking the winds and the sea, and producing a great calm. Therefore he leaves the issue to God, who will, in His own good time and way, plead His own and His people's cause. The only revenge permitted to the Christian is to return good for evil. And this is true wisdom; for the most effectual way of vanquishing an enemy is to make him ashamed of himself, and so make him a friend.

But with all this forbearing and forgiving spirit, there is yet another element of Christian meekness, which must not be forgotten, for it is a necessary evidence of the sincerity of our faith and love, and a proof that in our submission to God there is neither looking back, nor holding back, nor drawing back, nor turning back. This fourth element is, STEADFASTNESS IN AND FOR THE TRUTH. The meek man, though not tenacious of his individual rights, and always anxious to avoid contention, is usually firm in all cases where truth and righteousness are involved. He can sacrifice his personal feelings, but he cannot sacrifice his principles. It

is no doubt true, that "principles" are often put forth as a mere cloak for jealousy and animosity; and the Christian has need to watch the door of his heart carefully, lest Satan make a tool of him, and gain an advantage over him. But let there be clearly a question of right and wrong; let the truth of God be impugned, or the rights or liberties of men, either in Church or State, be imperilled; and the meekness of the lamb straightway becomes the boldness of the lion. There are too many who are ready to take umbrage, and even exhibit violent anger, when their own good name is impeached, who can nevertheless sit very patiently while the Name of God is blasphemed, and His laws openly defied. That is not meekness, but moral cowardice. The truly meek man is "valiant for the truth upon the earth" (Jer. ix. 3). He can bear with unruffled spirit the petty sneers of scorners, and the cheats of the hucksters of this world; but let them once bring their profane scoffs and vile trafficking into the temple—let them attempt to convert the house of prayer into a den of thieves—and then his zeal consumes him: the soldier of Christ will arise and drive them out, not indeed with a literal scourge, or with any carnal weapons, but with the only weapon permitted to fallible man, the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. It is well known to all that have studied the pages of Christian biography, that the most eminent champions of revealed truth—such men as Augustine and Athanasius, Luther and Knox, Chillingworth and Barrow, Toplady and Jonathan Edwards, and a host of others—were, without exception, men of the most meek and gentle dispositions in private life, who mourned, like Jeremiah,* for the necessity of those controversies, from which their love of truth would not suffer them to shrink.

* Jer. xv. 10.

Such, then, is Christian meekness. "Blessed," saith our Divine COUNSELLOR, "are the meek."

They are blessed, because such a temper of mind directly tends to produce happiness. They who are easily ruffled live in a sea of troubles, and know nothing of that peaceful serenity which is essential to true happiness. The meek escape those annoyances which make other men's lives a perpetual running sore. They foresee them, and avoid them; or, if they cannot avoid them, they prepare to encounter them with calmness and resolution. This is true wisdom, and true heroism.

They are blessed, because they alone have a real capacity for enjoyment. A touchy, morbidly sensitive man, who is always fancying himself slighted or aggrieved, cannot be happy; for at every turn in life's road he meets with something or other that grazes the angles of his self-esteem, and suffers him not to rest. The meek man smiles at these things, for he has a fund of happiness within himself. He is not callous to reproach or indignity; but he has that in his heart which more than counterbalances them, and he can bear them without being overwhelmed.

But, above all, the meek man is blessed, because he is like Christ, who is our pattern in all things, and eminently so in this: His whole life was a continuous exemplification of the spirit of meekness. It was foretold of Him by the prophet, that, though He was the King of Zion, He should come, meek and lowly, and without any of the pageantry of royalty. And so in truth He came, and taught the heavy-laden toilers and mourners of this world, saying, "Take MY yoke upon you, and learn of ME; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls." So, the Apostles that planted the first Churches taught, saying, "The fruit of the Spirit is meekness" (Gal. v. 23); "put

on meekness" (Col. iii. 12); "put them in mind to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men" (Tit. iii. 1, 2); "receive with meekness the engrafted word" (Jam. i. 21); "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. iii. 15); all tending to show, that without meekness the Christian character cannot be fully developed: that this, in short, is one of the chief of those graces which flow from the head of the great High Priest, and go down to the skirts of His garments, covering all the members of His body (Ps. cxxxiii. 2).

A word, in closing, concerning the exceeding great and precious promise with which this Beatitude is confirmed, and in which we find the sum of all the blessedness predicated of the meek: "they shall inherit the earth."

The promise appears to be a quotation from the thirty-seventh Psalm, v. 11: "The meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." And, as the Old Testament promises had, for the most part, an immediate reference to temporal blessings, it has been attempted to explain *this* promise, both as uttered by the Psalmist and as repeated by our Lord, as if it had a merely temporal significance—as if it meant simply, that the meek shall possess and enjoy every temporal blessing, so far as God may see it to be needful or suitable for them. Even in this inferior and limited sense, it is true that the promise is amply fulfilled. The meek, from their habitual calmness and self-control, as well as because they guide their affairs with discretion, and act with due deliberation, are prepared to occupy any station with credit, and usually obtain the esteem, if not the affection, of all around

them. Men who do not adopt their principles, and copy not their example, nevertheless tacitly acknowledge the excellence of both by consulting them, and giving them influence and authority, in the full assurance that these will not be abused. In the affairs of commerce also, such men, though possessing not more than ordinary sagacity and industry, never fail to make friends and establish for themselves "a connection," as it is called; winning, by the sheer force of gentleness, not only golden opinions, but usually a sufficiency also of that material gold which ranks its possessor, in a literal sense, among the inheritors of the earth.

All this is true; but surely this does not exhaust the promise. "Godliness," of which meekness is so prominent a feature, "is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. iv. 8). Evangelical commentators accordingly make "the earth" equivalent to "the land," that is, the land of Canaan, the temporal inheritance promised to Abraham and his natural seed. Canaan being an acknowledged type of heaven, it is supposed that the promise assigned to the meek is nothing more than a repetition in another form of that assigned to the poor-in-spirit: "theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

This also is true. It is true, that the kingdom of grace here, and the kingdom of glory hereafter, are the portion of the meek. But the peculiar force of the promise must not be lost sight of, as it generally is, by those who are contented with this figurative interpretation. None of the promises attached to the other Beatitudes are figurative; and there seems no necessity for making this an exception. It is plainly revealed, that this earth on which we live, purified and renovated at the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus, shall be the inheritance of the saints. We look, not for a deportation hence to

some distant sphere, or to some imaginary heaven far beyond the existing creation, but simply for "a new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet. iii. 13). That new earth is the destined seat of the kingdom of glory, in which the Lord Jesus shall reign as King of Zion, and King over all the earth, and His saints shall reign with Him in glory. Christ has conquered it for His chosen ones; and they who have fought the good fight of faith under His banner, and meekly suffered with Him the contradiction of sinners and the reproach of His Cross, shall, in the plainest and most extensive sense of the words, *inherit the earth.* They do not conquer it by their own wisdom, or by the strength of their own arm; but they *inherit* it, as Christ's brethren, and as the sons of God. Being children, they are heirs—heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. The earth, or, more properly, portions of the earth, have been conquered by kings in days of old, after years of battle and bloodshed, and the conquered countries have been divided among the victors: these, after a few generations, have in turn been subjugated, and a new partition of territory has occurred. So, the winged bulls of Assyria were trodden down by the armies of Babylon: Babylon fell before Persia: Persia before Macedon. The "world" of Alexander was subdued by the Roman eagles; and Rome herself in turn fell—in the west, before the barbaric hordes from which Modern Europe has sprung; in the East, before the crescent of Islâm. A kingdom greater than all these remains yet to be set up—a kingdom which shall fill the whole earth, and which shall never be destroyed, but shall stand for ever (Dan. ii. 35–44). It is of this kingdom that the meek are the inheritors. The meek, who wait on the Lord, shall obtain peacefully "that world:" * it is their in-

* Luke xx. 35.

heritance, inalienable, incorruptible, undefiled, unfading; while the world, for which so many thousands have bartered their souls, shall be dissolved, and its mirth, its pomps, and its sordid gains, plunged into the abyss of darkness and despair.

This inheritance includes all the blessedness of the heavenly state—the absence of all pain and sorrow—victory over all enemies—positive and perfect enjoyment in the presence of God to all-eternity.

Is this inheritance mine?

Not, if I am not found united to Christ. Not, if I am still in arms against God. Not, if I am playing fast and loose with my convictions, halting between two opinions, and putting off the great business of repentance and faith to a more convenient season.

Has it been thus—is it so now—with me? To-day let me come to a decision!

To-day let me arise, and claim my inheritance! To-day let me resolve, in the strength of Divine grace, to forsake my native world and seek a better country; and thus I know that all things shall be mine—whether the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come—all are the inheritance of them that are in Christ—an inheritance prepared for them from the foundation of the world!

## IV.

## BLESSED HUNGER AND THIRST.

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled."—MATT. v. 6.

IT has been observed, concerning popular proverbs, that, though apparently sagacious and founded on experience, very few of them are absolutely and universally true; while many of them are altogether unsound and fallacious. Nevertheless, proverbs continue popular; nay, some of the most unsound are the most popular; for mankind are always willing to encourage themselves in their favourite practices by these quaint sayings,* which, like some other "traditions of the fathers," have little merit beyond their antiquity. We have an example of this in the very common proverb, "Necessity has no law;" which, when used as implying anything more than that *ordinary circumstances must yield to necessity*, is both false and dangerous. Necessity can never justify a theft or a lie; much less can any departure from strict integrity be justified by mere expediency, the fear of loss, reproach, or ridicule, or the desire of gain. Yet it is usually in

* Thus: "The better day the better deed," is frequently made an apology for desecration of the Sabbath. "In for a penny, in for a pound," or, "As well be hung for a sheep as a lamb," is a too ready excuse for another step in the way of evil.

defence of such delinquencies that the proverb is quoted.

Of all the necessities of our physical constitution, the most imperious are hunger and thirst. If any necessities could justify a breach of the Moral Law (as they do justify a breach of merely ceremonial laws*), it would be these. But it is not so: the Law of God makes no exception; and gives no man the right, whatever may be his necessity, to depart one hair's-breadth from the letter of the commandment.

Can it be possible, then, that under any circumstances, hunger and thirst should be "blessed?" Undoubtedly, it is possible. If bread is only to be obtained by theft or fraud, it is blessed to be hungry. It is more blessed to die, than to steal, or take the name of our God in vain. It is blessed to be poor, hungry and thirsty, ill-housed and ill-clad, rather than become rich by any indirection. But our blessed Lord tells us of a hunger and thirst which are far stronger than any physical necessity, and which are "blessed" in the highest sense; for they that hunger and thirst for perishable meat and drink do not always obtain what they need; but "Blessed," saith the Saviour, "are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled."

There are few men in this world that do not hunger and thirst after something; for every vehement desire of the soul, as well as of the body, may be considered as included in this form of expression. There are some that live as though eating and drinking were the grand and paramount concerns of life: others live to heap up riches: others to acquire worldly honours and distinctions: others hunger and thirst for the gratifications of sense, or the pleasures of worldly society. And as the

* See Matt. xii. 3, 4.

hungry or thirsty man rejoices when his fainting soul is revived with meat and drink, so these craving worldlings rejoice when they have attained any of their objects. But their rejoicing is only temporary: they are not really filled; the feeding of any fleshly appetite only appeases it for a time. Such hunger and thirst are not blessed. Our desires are blessed only when they are fixed on an object certainly and fully attainable, and which, when attained, is able to satisfy the soul.

Such an object our Lord sets before us in this Beatitude.

It is RIGHTEOUSNESS; a term used in the Scripture with various significations. The Greek word here employed strictly signifies *justice* or *uprightness;* and from this all other significations of the word are derived. It is applied in the Scriptures both to things human and to things Divine.

Some, who are fond of unusual and strained interpretations, have contended, that our Lord here refers to the oppressed of the earth—the slave and the prisoner, held in unrighteous bonds, whom the Scriptures frequently represent as crying in vain for justice, and whose cry, though despised by their tyrants and partial judges on earth, has "entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth" (Jam. v. 4). It is indeed a faithful saying: "Behold, we count them happy which endure" (Jam. v. 11). If they that are wronged and oppressed bear their wrongs patiently and meekly, they will find a blessing in it; and the faith which enables them to endure will bring forth fruit to God's glory. But this indirect blessedness cannot be that which is contemplated in this Beatitude; for it is not the hunger and thirst for deliverance that are blessed, but the faith and patience whereby they endure; and besides, many hunger and thirst for deliverance in this kind, without exhibiting any gracious disposition

whatever, and without any blessing, present or prospective; whereas the hunger and thirst of which our Lord speaks is in every case blessed, for it shall certainly be satisfied.

The term "Righteousness" is also used in Scripture to denote the scheme of justification which God has provided for sinners, in the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Accordingly, some have thought that our Lord meant to say, "Blessed are they, who, being convinced of their own sinfulness in God's sight, and of the impossibility of obtaining salvation by any righteousness of their own, hunger and thirst after 'God's righteousness,' or justification (Rom. iii. 21, 22), that they may appear righteous before God." And it is beyond all doubt, that such a desire is "blessed" in the highest sense, and that it shall never be disappointed; for he that cometh to Christ, with sincere and fervent desires of this kind, shall in no wise be cast out, but shall be filled with all the fulness of God. It is however by no means probable that our Lord intended to speak of Righteousness in the theological sense. The minds of His disciples were not prepared for the reception of doctrinal truth; and it may be safely affirmed, that not one of those who heard this discourse would understand these words in this way. That there is an *ulterior* reference to "the righteousness of God," may be admitted, for that is the only perfect righteousness; and he whose hunger and thirst fails to attain to that, can never be filled.*

There seems no reason for supposing that our Lord here used "Righteousness" in any other than the common acceptation, namely, practical holiness, or conformity to the will of God. His intention throughout this discourse, as will be abundantly apparent, was to

* Consult Phil. iii. 8, 9, and context.

teach the people the necessity of practical and personal holiness, and of strict conformity to the Law of God, and thus to open their hearts for the admission of Gospel truth. He accordingly tells them, that to desire righteousness is infinitely higher and nobler than to desire those things which the children of this world seek after;* and that they who are sincerely animated by this blessed desire shall be filled to the satisfying of their souls. It is most true, indeed, that no man does thus ardently and truly crave after holiness, until he has been renewed by the Holy Spirit; but our Lord's words point out what ought to be the supreme object of desire to all that seek after happiness; and they who are impelled to this search by such desire give therein evidence that the Spirit is dealing with them, leading them "into the land of uprightness" (Ps. cxliii. 10), and bringing them into union with Him in whom they shall find all their salvation and all their desire. If mankind were all hungering and thirsting after righteousness, the main hindrance to the reception of the Gospel would be removed: the Word of the Lord would then have free course, and be glorified.

WHAT is it, then, to HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS?

It implies *a painful sensation of want.* Physical hunger and thirst cause the greatest pain: and it is this pain, or the apprehension of it, which causes men to labour. It is this urgent craving of nature which overcomes man's native indolence, and which lies at the root of all commercial enterprise and civilization. So soon as the newly-born child has breathed, his first want is food: his first sensation is hunger. It is so likewise

* Compare vi. 33.

with the soul. The Divine life of him that is born of the Spirit may be said to begin with hunger. Convinced of his sin and misery; awakened to a sense of his true position in the sight of God; feeling his own emptiness, nothingness, vileness; taught to know the vanity of earthly things, which only fill the mouth with ashes, and leave the heart an aching void; he begins to long for that which he knows he has not, but which he must have, or he cannot live. This is spiritual hunger; and as it is sin, or the defect of righteousness, which creates the want, so it is righteousness, and nothing less, that can satisfy it. Therefore he hungers and thirsts for it until he obtains it.

The legitimate object of this spiritual hunger and thirst is spiritual meat and drink. But it does not necessarily follow, that he who is spiritually hungry has always a true spiritual appetite for true spiritual food. Persons of a sickly dyspeptic habit of body are often really hungry, and experience a painful sensation of want; yet, when good wholesome food is placed before them, they do not eat; or, if they constrain themselves to eat a small portion, it is almost immediately rejected. Such is the case with many souls. Conviction of sin demonstrates a want, and creates a painful craving; but frequently when the true bread and water of life are set before the hungry sinner, he will not eat or drink. And as it often happens that dyspeptic patients, who cannot partake of plain diet, will greedily swallow sweatmeats and highly-seasoned food, which stimulate the palate but aggravate their disease; so Satan has ever ready an assortment of cunningly-devised stimulants, on which the hungering soul seizes with canine avidity, but which, after the brief excitement has subsided, leave it unsatisfied and exhausted. It is thus that thousands are beguiled with the veriest garbage, in which there is not one

nutritious element : it is thus that, in the frenzy of their thirst, thousands turn their backs on the Fountain of living waters, and hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, which they find, sooner or later, to their confusion and dismay, will not hold a drop of water. It is thus that so many sinners attain to the conviction of sin, and never advance beyond it ! It is thus that so many, who have the true bread of God, and the sincere milk of the Word, and the wine that cheereth God and man, set before them in the ordinances of the sanctuary, have never really eaten and drunk, but are still hungry and thirsty. It is thus that in many professing Christians the true appetite for these heavenly dainties has yet to be awakened. It is thus that many—alas, how many !—go down to the grave hungry and thirsty, because they have no relish for the rich spiritual feast which the love of God has provided for them !

Hence this blessed hunger and thirst implies *an earnest seeking after righteousness.* He that really wants food, and has a real appetite for it, does not sit idly waiting until it is brought to him : he goes forth and seeks it. So, he that hungers and thirsts after righteousness seeks the Lord with all his heart and soul. And at the same time he recognises the necessity of seeking in the appointed way. He that seeks after daily bread must seek lawfully, and by honest and patient labour earn what shall supply his need ; and similarly, in the things of God there is an appointed way, by which alone all that seek after God must approach Him. This way no man can discover for himself : they only find it who are taught of God's Spirit ; and the simple reason why so many continue for years, it may be all their lives, groping after God in the dark, is that they will not open their eyes and follow the light. He that truly seeks after righteousness seeks by the light of God's word ; and

thus he soon finds that Christ is the end, or fulfilling, of the Law for righteousness, and that there is no perfect righteousness but His. He soon learns that no merely human righteousness is able to stand in the judgment of an infinitely holy God; and that no human righteousness can be acceptable to God which is not the fruit of a living union with His Son. Our spiritual necessities therefore must bring us to the Cross of Christ, or they can never be effectually relieved. In His blood our natural and acquired pollution must be washed away: in His righteousness we must be clothed as with a garment. Thus being made servants to God, we have our fruit unto holiness in our own hearts and lives: He Himself leads us in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake.

That hunger and thirst, however, which are first awakened by the conviction of sin, are by no means quenched when the sinner is justified, adopted into God's family, and made to eat of that meat which the Son of Man giveth unto him.* The babe in Christ must be fed with milk, and he that is of full age with strong meat, that they may grow thereby.† The believer therefore continues to hunger and thirst after righteousness, and seeks daily supplies from the ordinances of God. The use of these very terms, hunger and thirst, seems to imply a frequently recurring want, and the consequent necessity of obtaining a regular and adequate supply. In the feeding of the body this is universally recognised. If the body is fed at irregular times, or with insufficient or unsuitable food, we all know that health cannot long be preserved. And be the food ever so wholesome, if it be not thoroughly masticated and digested, it does not yield its due amount of nourishment to the system. The same holds good with respect to the feeding of the

* John vi. 27. † Heb. v. 12-14; 1 Pet. ii. 1.

soul. If we would have our souls prosper, they must be regularly and plentifully fed with wholesome food; and this food must be rightly apprehended and patiently digested. God Himself has taught us the necessity of this regular feeding of the soul by the institution of the Sabbath, and the establishment of the Church. There was no need for any express Divine appointment of stated times for feeding the body: our animal instincts do not suffer this to be seriously neglected. But the spiritual instincts, even of the children of God, are often very sluggish, and the necessities of the soul are very frequently overlooked and postponed, and would be so more frequently, if not in some cases altogether neglected, were it not that the Sabbath provides a regular time, and the ordinances of the Church a regular supply. These ordinances are God's provision for Zion: it is by them that He satisfies His poor with bread.* Unhappily, too many do not avail themselves of these opportunities. Many come to the house of prayer so irregularly that they reap little or no benefit; and of those who do attend regularly, a large number do not grow in the strength of their food, either because they do not receive it in a humble spirit, or because they do not sufficiently digest it by subsequent prayer and meditation, or because they suffer the cares of this world, and the lusts of other things entering in, to choke the word, and render it unfruitful.† They that truly hunger and thirst after righteousness, and are earnestly striving to attain "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," ‡ must give diligent heed to the sustenance of the spiritual life that is in them by the humble and persevering use of all the means of grace; that so, being not forgetful hearers, but doers of God's work, they may be blessed in their deed—that they may "walk worthy

* Ps. cxxxii. 15. † Mark iv. 19. ‡ Eph. iv. 13.

of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. i. 10).

Such is the hunger and thirst which our Lord pronounces "blessed:" an earnest desire after holiness, which leads a man to seek for it in God's appointed way, and in the use of God's appointed means. It is necessary to insist on these conditions: for it is possible to have very strong desires after righteousness, or personal holiness, which are not *blessed.* All desires for grace are not gracious desires. Spiritual gifts have often been sought for unholy ends, and by unholy means. "This is a true saying: If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" (1 Tim. iii. 1). Yet how many have desired this good work from the most profane and corrupt motives! Some, merely as a profession, that they might eat a piece of bread;* others, because they hoped thereby to obtain distinction and influence. Simon the sorcerer desired spiritual gifts; but so little true spirituality of heart mingled with his desire, that he thought the gift of God could be purchased with money. The monastic system of the Church of Rome, though originating in a professed desire, doubtless in many cases quite sincere, of promoting personal holiness, is not blessed, but rather accursed; for it doeth evil, that good may come: it puts contempt on God's ordinance of marriage, which "is honourable in all" (Heb. xiii. 4); it is, at best, a cowardly way of escaping from the warfare which it is the Christian's duty to maintain openly; and it has been the prolific parent of every kind of abomination. Or, again: how many profess ardently to desire eternal life, who nevertheless have no more exalted notion of it,

* 1 Sam. ii. 36.

than that it will be an escape from the punishment which conscience tells them they deserve, and a relief from the labours and sorrows of this world! The heaven of many nominal Christians is little better than that of the modern Jew or the Mahometan, which in turn is borrowed, with very slight improvement, from the ancient heathen mythologies: the leading idea being the perpetual gratification of the senses, without that exhaustion or habitude which is experienced in this life.*

To hunger and thirst after righteousness in this sort is not blessed; for the blessedness contemplated is a delusion—a mirage—a cup of Tantalus—which serves to excite the imagination, but ends only in bitter mockery and the anguish of despair.

But hunger and thirst after righteousness in the way appointed of God, is really blessed; not indirectly or comparatively only, but blessed in itself.

It is blessed, as being an evidence of a regenerate heart—of a heart in which eternal life is begun—that life, which, when once imparted, can never be destroyed. Hungering and thirsting after meat and drink is not a more certain evidence of physical life, than hungering and thirsting after righteousness is an evidence of spiritual life. A dead body has no appetite: its home is the sepulchre: its end corruption. Our souls are born dead and corrupt: our natural tendencies are all to darkness and misery. But God, who is rich in mercy, quickeneth us anew in Christ; and the evidence of this spiritual quickening is a desire for spiritual food—a longing for communion with God and for conformity to the image of His Son. That is a blessed desire.

It is blessed, because the means employed to obtain that which is desired impart blessedness in the using of

* 2 Sam. xix. 35; Eccles. xii. 3–5.

them. The food earned by honest labour is sweet—the sweeter for the very labour. Not so the dainties which have been the object of inordinate desire. These are sweet in the mouth, but when they are eaten, the belly is often bitter. The children of Israel loathed their lawful bread, though it was the food of angels: they lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert; and He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul: His wrath also fell upon them, and slew the fattest of them.* But the prayerful use of the means of grace for the feeding of the soul is itself a positive and most legitimate enjoyment. "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house: they will be still praising Thee" (Ps. lxxxiv. 4), exclaims the sweet Psalmist of Israel, than whom no man more largely experienced the blessedness of which he sang. "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance. In Thy Name shall they rejoice all the day; and in Thy righteousness shall they be exalted" (Ps. lxxxix. 15, 16).

This hunger and thirst are blessed also because they bring us into blessed company. Eating and drinking are social actions: the custom of taking meals in company, and tarrying one for another, is an evidence of civilization, and affords opportunities for the cultivation of proprieties and courtesies, which may, and should, prevail at the labourer's humble board, as well as at the sumptuous tables of the rich. They that hunger and thirst after righteousness are also a company, children of the same Father, servants of the same Master, sustained by the same daily provision, rejoicing in the same promises, heirs of the same fulness of joy. Christianity is pre-eminently a social religion: its ordinances

* Ps. lxxviii. 25–31; cvi. 14, 15.

are social; all its tendencies are social; its ideal is a perfected communion of saints; and religion is not enjoyed in a proper spirit, nor is its practical benefit realised, when it does not draw men together, and when every joint does not supply something to the compacting of the body, thus contributing to the increase and edifying of the whole in love.*

But, no doubt, the chief element of the blessedness which our Lord assigns to the hunger and thirst after righteousness is to be found in the promise with which He confirms His word: "they shall be filled."

This it is that constitutes the grand distinction between desires set on earthly things, and desires set on heavenly things. They whose affection is set on things of the earth are never really filled: or, if filled to-day, they have no security that they shall be filled to-morrow. They who continually take thought, saying, What shall we eat, or what shall we drink? are never satisfied. And they who spend their money on the deceitful meats of this world's vanity, spend it for that which is not bread. In the language of the prophet Amos (ii. 7), "they pant for the dust of the earth;" and in the Eternal world it is not fulness that awaits them, but an insatiable thirst, to slake which they shall cry for one drop of cold water, and shall cry in vain.

But they that hunger and thirst after righteousness *shall be filled.* It is God's own promise: "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it" (Ps. lxxxi. 10). He filleth the hungry with good things; and the rich (they that think themselves rich) He sendeth empty away (Luke i. 53). To him that delighteth himself in the Lord His promise is sure: He will give him the desire of his heart (Ps. xxxvii. 4). He satiates the weary soul (Jer. xxxi.

* Eph. iv. 16.

25 ;) and He alone is able to do it ; for the soul is infinite and immortal. Now, indeed, it is confined in a tabernacle of clay, and its faculties and aspirations are of the earth, earthy ; but they that hunger and thirst after righteousness have received a new life, and new strength, which enables them to mount up with wings as eagles, and soar beyond the regions of sense to the presence of the Eternal and Unchangeable God. Even in this life they receive out of Christ's fulness grace for grace—grace upon grace, and every kind of grace—they are changed into His image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord Christ.

The promise, however, in its greatest extent, can only be realised in the heavenly kingdom. The believer is filled, in this life, so far as his capacity will permit ; but he is not filled to the absolute extinction of desire. It is only of the inhabitants of the heavenly kingdom that it can be said, without exception or reservation, that "they hunger no more, neither thirst any more." There, we shall neither ask nor desire. "In that day," saith the Saviour, "ye shall ask me nothing." All our desires shall be fulfilled, and nothing will be left to ask for. We shall behold the face of God IN RIGHTEOUSNESS—the very thing for which we are now hungering and thirsting ; we shall be satisfied (filled) with God's likeness * (Ps. xvii. 15).

Am *I* thus hungering and thirsting after righteousness ?

Let me encourage these blessed desires, for they are not vain. They that be planted in the Lord's house shall be like trees full of sap—the cedars of Lebanon which He hath planted. Let me no longer seek to

* The Septuagint translates the latter part of this verse : χορτασθήσομαι ἐν τῷ ὀφθῆναι τὴν δόξαν σου· = I shall be satiated in looking upon thy glory. —ψαλ. ις 15.

quell the longings of my undying soul with the miserable swine-husks of this world; but let me rather yield to the gracious invitation of my heavenly Father: let me hearken diligently unto Him, and eat that which is good, and let my soul delight itself in fatness (Isa. lv. 2).

## V.

## BLESSED MERCY.

"Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy."—MATT. v. 7.

THE Beatitudes, it has already been observed, are spiritual paradoxes, every one of them enunciating a sentiment opposed to the traditions of this world, and contradicting the prepossessions of the great mass of mankind. It is probable, however, that the Beatitude which now invites our attention will be regarded by many as an exception to this general description. It may perhaps be thought that although Poverty-in-spirit, Mournfulness, Meekness, and Hungering and Thirsting after Righteousness, are esteemed by the world at large as mean and contemptible qualities, and though the right appreciation of these qualities can only result from the teaching of the Holy Spirit, yet it is otherwise with the quality of Mercy. Many will be disposed to say, that, in this instance at least, our Lord has uttered nothing more than the echo of a universal voice; that mercy is the most popular of all the virtues; and that even those who are not merciful themselves are constrained to admire and applaud mercy in others. And it is so far true, that mercy has in all ages formed a constant and fertile theme of panegyric for all those who have addressed themselves to the popular mind. Poets, orators, and historians,

throughout the world, have anticipated, or repeated in various forms, the noble sentiment of our own great dramatist :—

> " The quality of mercy is not strained :
> It droppeth, as the gentle rain from heaven
> Upon the place beneath : it is twice blessed :
> It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes :
> 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest : it becomes
> The throned monarch better than his crown ;" &c.*

But, while it is cheerfully conceded that the common verdict of mankind has in this case gone far in the direction of the truth, it is impossible not to entertain strong doubts of the sincerity of that applause which deeds of mercy call forth from the multitude. It is to be feared, that much of that applause springs from a very imperfect apprehension of what mercy really is; and, looking at the world generally, and knowing how much more frequently men, even professing Christians, act from impulse than from principle, it is scarcely possible to resist the conclusion, that, however mercy may be extolled, it is seldom rightly practised ; and that our Divine COUNSELLOR, in saying " Blessed are the merciful," uttered a sentiment, which, though not openly contravened, is not thoroughly believed, or adopted as a rule of life, by the majority of mankind, and can be fully received only by those who are taught of the Spirit of God.

In order to exhibit the grounds for a conclusion apparently so uncharitable, it will be necessary to contrast the popular estimate of mercy with the true and Scriptural estimate of it.

Let us first look at mercy in the popular estimate of it. What is that which men call mercy, and extol as the

* "Merchant of Venice," Act. iv.

queen of all virtues? Without attempting any very subtle distinctions, it will probably be admitted, that the popular estimate of mercy includes little more than these two things: namely, a sentiment of compassion, and a disposition to leniency.

There is in most men a natural dislike to witness, or even to hear or speak of, suffering in any shape: the mere sight of distress excites pain and pity, and a corresponding desire to relieve and remove it. This is simply natural compassion; and there is no more moral virtue in it, than there is in the sympathy which our whole bodies feel when one member is injured. Every man naturally shrinks from suffering in his own person, and from witnessing it in others: the man who actually takes pleasure in beholding suffering, either in man or beast, is justly execrated as an inhuman monster. In many persons this natural shrinking is so powerful, that it unfits them for the discharge of necessary duties; as a man who faints at the sight of blood is incompetent for the profession of a surgeon, and unable to give efficient assistance in cases of accident; or a woman who is thus over-sensitive is disqualified for the office of a nurse, or even for the ordinary duties of a mother. So, there are many who cannot endure the sight of a beggar, especially if he be ragged and full of sores: the suffering object excites the most painful sensations, and in order to be rid of these, and of their immediate cause, they give alms, sometimes largely, often injudiciously. The wretches who are mendicants by profession thoroughly understand the profuse and unthinking character of this sympathetic benevolence, and boldly calculate upon the harvest which they expect to reap from it; and the more abject and revolting they can make themselves appear, the more surely do they count their anticipated booty.

It is worthy of consideration, how much of what the world calls "mercy" may be resolved into this mere natural compassion, in which, as there is no exercise of judgment, and no moral self-control, there can be nothing worthy of the name of virtue. It is by no means intended to insinuate, that *all* the tender-heartedness and generosity of men of this world is to be reduced to this low type; but, in these days of glitter and jingle, it is more than ever necessary to discriminate between the false and the real, and not to suffer a spurious sentimentalism to usurp the credit due to high and holy principle alone.

The other element entering into the popular estimate of mercy is leniency, that is, forbearance, either in enforcing what is right, or in restraining and punishing evil-doers. And here also, it is to be feared, that much of what the world applauds as "mercy" is nothing more than natural sensibility, indolence, or mistaken policy.

It is not true mercy that induces the head of a family to refrain from exercising proper discipline in his house. Those feelings, indeed, which prompt the tender father to spare the child whom he loveth, or a generous master to pass by the disobedience of a servant, are not only intelligible, but deserving of sympathy. A wise man, however, will not suffer himself to be actuated by mere feeling: he will have regard to consequences: in the spirit of true mercy he will look to the future, as well as to the present; and will consider the child's or the servant's ultimate advantage, rather than his immediate exemption from restraint or correction.

And similarly, if we go beyond the province of domestic life, and have regard to the whole community. It is a very grave question, whether much of the social disorder which exhibits itself in breaches of trust, and

even in more violent outrages, may not be fairly traced to the *hope of impunity* cherished among the ill-educated and ill-disciplined classes, in consequence of an injudicious exercise of the prerogative of mercy on the part of governments, and what is almost as dangerous, an inconsiderate laxity in the enforcing of sentences. Those sentimental "philanthropists," as they are fond of calling themselves, who petition, and even agitate, for such pardons, commutations, or relaxations, appear to think that the criminals, who have defied the laws of their country, and made war—in many instances cruel and vindictive war—against their fellow-subjects, not for hearth, altar, or liberty, but solely for sordid plunder—that such men, or their wives and families, are the only persons to whom mercy should be shown, and that no consideration is due to the community which suffers from their deeds of violence. An act of sovereign mercy, which the unthinking frequently, and even clamorously, demand from a government, may obtain for the facile ruler a momentary applause. But mercy to a favourite criminal, even when a diseased sympathy has exalted him into a hero, is frequently the most grievous cruelty to the virtuous and industrious members of society, whose lives and property are thus left exposed to the midnight robber and assassin.

When this mistaken leniency becomes the deliberate policy of government, in countries where a large proportion of the population has been suffered to grow up almost beyond the reach of the law; where the extremes of luxury and destitution are found in close proximity; where a numerous nomadic and criminally-disposed class exists, in which the moral sense is feeble, but the love of excitement and adventure strong; and where the legislature has not pursued vigorous and prudent measures for repressing the development of crime, such,

namely, as increasing the facilities for education, and the promotion of sanitary and other social reforms directly bearing on the moral as well as the physical condition of the people; where all these circumstances are found combined, as is unhappily the case in too many countries in this age of boasted civilization and intellectual refinement, it is not to be wondered that crime stalks abroad with unabashed front, that orderly and well-affected citizens are kept in a continual state of excitement and alarm, and that the advocates of such a policy find themselves involved in consequences, which, however they may regret and abhor them, they can neither ignore nor evade. The skilful surgeon, no doubt, is he who effects a cure without subjecting his patient to a painful operation; but when the ulcer has so spread that the sound flesh is in danger of being affected, there is neither skill nor mercy in hesitating to apply the knife.

The compassion and leniency which have been described, whether exhibited in private or in public life, are not mercy. They often proceed from the most questionable impulses, and have very little, if any, of the gracious element associated with them.

And yet, even in this low view of mercy, it is not, after all, by any means so common a quality as many are inclined to suppose. "The benevolence of the public," there is reason to fear, is a popular fallacy. A large proportion of mankind, including many professing Christians, have no real benevolence, no real charity, no real mercy. With the majority of the public, charity begins at home, and also ends there. On certain great occasions, no doubt, when human distress has assumed exceptional dimensions—when there has been a war famine, or a cotton famine, or an earthquake, or an inundation, or other extraordinary calamity—there has

been a feverish start, a convulsive throe, of benevolence, and considerable sums have been raised, which have obtained for the donors the applause of the world, and have purchased for many the credit of a merciful disposition among those who knew them not. Pecuniary gifts are always an unsatisfactory test of true charity; but taking even this low test, the subscription-lists of our charitable institutions disclose the unflattering, but most unanswerable fact, that more than 90 per cent. of the population of our large cities throughout the British empire give nothing, literally nothing, for the relief of suffering humanity. There are some noble names, indeed, which greet the eye in every list: but where are the rest? Occasionally, we find an honourable man, one of ten with whom the Lord hath dealt bountifully, presenting his thank-offering: but where are the NINE?

All this sounds very harsh and censorious. But he who undertakes to declare God's statutes and His holy covenant dares not speak with flattering lips. Woe is unto him, if either the smiles or the frowns of men can induce him to speak smooth things and prophesy deceits (Isa. xxx. 10). It is his duty to speak the truth, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear. It is a painful but deliberate conviction, the result of many years' actual grappling with the difficulties of benevolent institutions, the deduction from facts and figures which can neither be disputed nor explained away, that there is very little real mercy in the world, and that the mass of mankind have no sympathy with the sentiment of the Beatitude, "Blessed are the merciful."

Let us turn then to the true and scriptural estimate of mercy. And here the fundamental distinction at once presents itself, namely, that whereas the spurious mercy of the unregenerate man springs from carnal motives,

and is usually partial and unequal in its efforts and in its effects, true mercy springs from the love of God, and always goes hand in hand with justice.

To obtain an accurate and enlarged conception of the quality of mercy, we must raise our eyes from this fallen world, and fix them on the Mercy-seat above. There, and there alone, we see mercy exhibited in perfect purity, without compromise of truth, without defeat of justice, without any shadow of temporising expediency.

God is the Sovereign of the universe. Myriads upon myriads of intelligent creatures are subject to His government: His kingdom is over all His works. The earth which we inhabit is but a very small part of God's kingdom—a mere province of His universal empire. In this province a rebellion broke out. The positive law of the Sovereign was broken. Death, the penalty of disobedience, was righteously incurred by the guilty rebels. "But God, who is rich in mercy," was willing to spare His offending creature. And if the popular notion of mercy were the true one, He might have done this by a simple act of oblivion—a royal pardon—the mere exercise of His sovereign prerogative. But what would have been the *moral character* and effect of such an act? First, with respect to God Himself, His truth would have been sacrificed—His word broken—the very foundation of His throne, and the brightness of His glory, utterly taken away. Secondly, with respect to His creatures that had not sinned, such an act would have taught them that sin might be committed with impunity. Thirdly, those of God's creatures who *had* sinned, and had been visited with immediate and condign punishment, would have had just cause for questioning the impartiality of the Divine administration. And, lastly, the guilty criminals themselves would only have been encouraged to further acts of rebellion. Even human

reason fails not to perceive, that such an act would not have been really and ultimately merciful to the guilty, while it must have tended to spread disorder and disaffection throughout the Divine empire. How, then, should God show mercy in such a case?

The Cross of Christ is the solution of the mystery. There truth met with mercy; righteousness and peace kissed each other. There mercy rejoiced against judgment (Jam. ii. 13): not against justice, but against the judgment which justice had pronounced against the sinner. It would be no cause for rejoicing, that God's justice had been defeated: the mercy which effected such a defeat, were such a contradiction conceivable, would not have been true mercy. But the joy was, that while justice remained immaculate, the judgment was turned aside from the sinner, and carried into effect upon another victim. The wrath, which was justly due to guilty man, God poured out upon the innocent head of His own Son, who on His part cheerfully undertook to be man's substitute and surety. Though He took not on Him the nature of angels, and wrought no salvation for the fallen of that race, yet He took on Him the seed of Abraham, and was found in fashion as a man. Having glorified God on earth by a life of spotless obedience, He finished the work which the Father had given Him to do by dying the death of the guilty, and suffering the full penalty and curse of sin. It was thus that God showed mercy to man; not by remitting the sentence of justice, but by exacting it to the uttermost farthing; not by a sovereign act of gratuitous mercy, but by giving His own Son to die the death. Thus it was made to appear, that sin could not be committed with impunity: thus, every semblance of partiality was removed from the Divine government: thus, the act of grace, instead of being an encouragement to sin, became

the most powerful incentive to holiness. Herein indeed is mercy!

In the Gospel, God hath showed us what is good. He hath shown us the true and the real, in opposition to what is false and meretricious. If we would be merciful, we must be so as God is merciful (Luke vi. 36). God requires us "to do justly, and to love mercy" (Mic. vi. 8). It is impossible for us always to *show* mercy, in the sense of passing by transgression, for that would be to compromise justice. But we may always love mercy; and if we do really *love* mercy, we shall not want opportunities of *showing* it in a manner perfectly consistent with justice.

In states, as has been shown, this is rarely, if ever, possible. "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God" (2 Sam. xxiii. 3). He must not bear the sword in vain; "for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Rom. xiii. 4). The peace and happiness of the entire community depend, politically speaking, upon the security of life, liberty, and property; but that security is maintained only by the rigorous and impartial administration of equal laws: it is thus that thrones are made stable, and nations increase in wealth and power. Severe justice is, therefore, in human governments, real mercy.

But the Gospel exhortations to mercy are chiefly intended for the direction of private individuals, and do not apply to the public policy of rulers. And the Divine example teaches us, that the only consistent way of showing mercy is, *by ourselves paying the price of it.* That example speaketh to us in this wise—"Be merciful at thine own expense; not at the expense of others. Hast thou a debtor? thou mayest well remember that God has forgiven thee an enormous debt, which

thou wast wholly unable to pay. Shouldest thou then take thy fellow-servant by the throat, and cast him into prison for the sake of the few pence he oweth thee? Shouldest thou not rather be merciful to him, even as God had mercy on thee? Dost thou see thy brother a stranger, or sick, or in prison? And wouldest thou pass by on the other side? Shouldest thou not rather remember how the Son of God beheld thee, stripped, wounded, and half-dead—how He passed by thee when thou wast naked and in thy blood—how He had compassion on thee, and poured in the oil and the wine—and go, and do likewise? The Holy Spirit hath not ceased to strive with thee, though thou hast often resisted and grieved Him. Shalt thou then be impatient, implacable, unmerciful, to them that by word or deed have injured thee?—God forbid!"

"Blessed are the merciful," is the teaching of Divine wisdom.

They are indeed blessed; for mercy, rightly understood, is an evidence of love and gratitude to God, and of a desire to be conformed to the image of Christ. Let it be remembered that mercy always supposes the object of it to be unworthy: if a man *deserve* favour, it is not mercy, but simple justice, to bestow it. Now, there are comparatively few men who are unwilling to return a kindness, or to show kindness where they expect the like again, perhaps with interest. But to show kindness where we have received none, and expect none; to do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again (Luke vi. 35); to be kind even to the unthankful and to the evil (*ibid*); to show mercy where the object has no claim upon us, but where rather we might justly punish; how few have any conception of mercy in this sense! It is impossible to be *thus* merciful, unless the love of God

be shed abroad in the heart; and this can only be the case when the Holy Spirit has cleansed that polluted fountain by the application of the blood of the Covenant. He that is thus cleansed learns to know the length and the breadth of the Divine mercy: and having received the spirit of adoption, he desires to be filled with all the fulness of God.

The merciful are blessed also, because the exercise of mercy is the highest delight of which our nature is capable. Though few men are really merciful, yet, perhaps, there is not one that does not wish to be thought so. Many, who have little charity in their hearts, give alms, that others may think them charitable, or rather that they may not be condemned as uncharitable. And even in this pitiful pretence of mercy they find great cause for self-gratulation; and they have their reward in the cheers which greet their names at public meetings, and in the incense which ascends to their nostrils from the altar of the newspaper. If, then, the mere pretence awakens so much delight, how much more the reality! The words of the Lord Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts xx. 35), contain a profound truth, which they alone can fully apprehend who have accustomed themselves to look at the secret springs of men's actions, and not at those which appear on the surface. Most of what passes for "giving" in this world is really *an investment*, for which a return is expected, either in the shape of applause, or increase of business, or worldly advantage of some kind. The giving which our Lord calls blessed is that for which no return is expected. It is mercy of this kind alone that can rightly be called a sacrifice; and it is with such sacrifices only that God is well pleased (Heb. xiii. 16).

Blessed are the merciful! for the truly merciful man

is a partaker of the Divine nature. It is by acts of mercy that the believer gives evidence that he is indeed a child of his heavenly Father. God so loved this ungrateful and rebellious world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that mercy might go forth in harmony with justice. "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour" (Eph. v. 1, 2).

But, above all, Blessed are the merciful, for to them the promise is sure: "they shall obtain mercy."

They shall obtain mercy from *men;* though it must be admitted that this is not always realized, and that mercy and generosity of the most disinterested kind do not always meet with acknowledgment and appreciation from a cold and selfish world. And it is certain that to make the applause of men our object in showing mercy is not according to the mind of Christ, and can bring no blessedness with it. But the truly merciful man does, nevertheless, as a general rule, obtain mercy, even from men. Not only does the character of such a man win for him the esteem and sympathy of all whose favourable judgment is of any value; but we are warranted in believing, even with respect to those who are disposed to act oppressively and vindictively, that the Lord overrules their hearts, restrains their malice, and brings good out of their evil devices. "When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even His enemies to be at peace with Him" (Prov. xvi. 7).

It is, however, mercy from God that we all need; and to this the promise of the text chiefly points. Though we have doubtless injured our fellow-men, if not directly, yet indirectly, in that we have not loved them as ourselves, and have not prayed and laboured for them with

that fervency and zeal which as Christ's followers we ought to have manifested; though none of us can plead "not guilty" concerning our brother, yet, as every sin is, ultimately, a sin against God, so every one of us may adopt the confession of the Psalmist—"I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight" (Ps. li. 3, 4). It is indeed our gracious and loving Father in heaven whom we have offended, and whose righteous anger we have repeatedly provoked; and it is from Him that we have need of mercy. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy" (Heb. iv. 16). Let us "give thanks unto the LORD, for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever. Who remembered us in our low estate; for His mercy endureth for ever. And hath redeemed us from our enemies; for His mercy endureth for ever" (Ps. cxxxvi. 1, 23, 24).

A single word of caution may here be necessary. We must beware of construing our Lord's promise as if this mercy from God could in any sense be obtained as the *reward of merit* for acts of mercy done by ourselves. It is no doubt true that the glories of the eternal kingdom are spoke of in Scripture as rewards for good deeds done by believers in this life; it is true that the recompense of these rewards is held forth to us during our warfare as an encouragement to patience and perseverance; but we must never forget that to us they are rewards of grace, and not of debt. It is impossible for any creature, and much more for any sinful creature, to deserve anything at the hands of God. Yet it is true that He, to magnify the riches of His grace, is pleased to honour His own work in us; and therefore He promises, that "whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance" (Matt. xiii. 12). If we

love mercy, and show mercy as we have opportunity, this is an evidence that we are the children of the Highest (Luke vi. 35) : the constraining love of Christ that dwelleth in us is in truth the witness of the Spirit that we are the children of God. And if we are God's children, then we are His heirs : joint-heirs with Christ : we are admitted by God's free grace to share that blessed inheritance which the merits of Christ have alone achieved. It is His of right : it is ours only as we are united to Him. Let us strive earnestly, then, to cultivate this most blessed disposition. "He shall have judgment without mercy that hath showed no mercy" (Jam. ii. 13) ; but the merciful man hath his reward in heaven. "Goodness and mercy shall follow him all the days of his life ; and he shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" (Ps. xxiii. 6).

## VI.

## BLESSED PURITY.

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."—MATT. v. 8.

THE Beatitude which we have now to consider, though probably its truth is generally acknowledged, and its moral beauty universally admired, is nevertheless opposed to the whole course of this world. Whatever the many may profess, they do not in reality believe that true happiness depends upon purity in heart; for, if they truly believed this with all their souls, they would seek after purity. No principle can be more certain than this, that the things which men most earnestly seek after are, not the things which they intellectually or morally approve, but the things which are congenial to their tastes, the things they love and desire, the things in which they expect to find happiness, that is, the sort of happiness of which alone they have any conception. Purity in heart, like mercy, is a very popular and fertile topic for sentimental declamation; but though the temples which men erect in honour of this ideal divinity are numerous, and adorned with all the flowers of rhetoric and the images of fancy, the builders and the decorators do not themselves worship therein: the incense offered is that of words, not of deeds. The lives of too many of the sons

and daughters of men demonstrate that pride, profit, and pleasure, are their real objects of worship. Sensuality, which S. John calls "the lust of the flesh;" covetousness and ambition, which are "the lust of the eye;" and the vain pomp and fashion of a perishing world, which are "the pride of life" (1 John ii. 16); these are what the natural man desires, and regards as his chief good.

That heart cannot be pure, in which such things are the objects of paramount desire: that life cannot be pure, which is spent in the pursuit of these things. It is not, indeed, to be denied, that the lives of many who are under the dominion of these worldly lusts exhibit a great semblance of purity and refinement. It is perfectly true, that in the higher and more exclusive circles of human society—among those who wear soft raiment, and dwell in kings' houses—the slightest approach to what is gross or indelicate, in word or deed, is most studiously avoided. Persons of cultivated minds and habits cannot tolerate either language or manners which are not in accordance with their own tastes; and thus an eminent statesman and philosopher of the last century* was induced to make the assertion, that "Vice itself lost half its evil by losing all its grossness." This witness is not true. Vice is still vice, though it be clad in purple and fine linen, decked with gold and jewels, and surrounded by the most subtle refinements of speech and behaviour; nay, the evil, instead of being diminished, is enhanced by being rendered more attractive. We have to do with Him that searcheth the heart, and unto whose eyes all things are naked and opened (Heb. iv. 13): it can avail us nothing therefore that we appear beautiful outwardly, if within we are full of extortion and excess.

* Edmund Burke, "Reflections on French Revolution."

It will be proper to inquire, first, in what Purity in heart consists.

Purity, in general, implies two things: freedom from admixture or adulteration; and freedom from pollution; or, in two words, simplicity and cleanness.

Purity implies SIMPLICITY. We say that a thing is pure when it is simple; that is, when it is *one* thing, and not *two* or more things. The ancients believed that the only simple or elementary substances were fire, water, earth, and air. Modern science has discovered that none of these are really simple, and that the number of simple substances in nature is not less than sixty, of which the greater part are metals. But it is well known, that nothing is more difficult than to obtain either metals r any other substances in a state absolutely pure. The ubstances, for example, which pass for gold and silver, are not really gold and silver, but admixtures of those metals with others. And similarly, most of the substances used in common life, as articles of food or raiment, are not what they profess to be, but mixtures, varying in quality and value according as they contain more or less of the substance whose name they bear. Perfect purity, in short, though much talked of, is a thing seldom actually found, either in nature or art.

This will help to illustrate the first meaning of purity as applied to the heart of man. The heart is popularly regarded as the seat of the affections and desires. When we say that a man's heart is set on such and such things, we mean, that he earnestly desires those things, and is diligently striving to obtain them. Hence purity in heart will mean simplicity or single-mindedness in purpose or desire, as opposed to duplicity or double-mindedness. "The double-minded man is unstable in all his ways" (Jam. i. 8), because he does not

go straight forward in one direction. It is both physically and morally impossible to move in two directions at the same time: yet how many attempt it! or, at least, while pretending to move in one direction, are really moving in another! This is double-mindedness. But the single-minded man has one object, one desire, one controlling motion in all he thinks, says, or does. He has *a single eye*—an eye which looks only in one direction, and towards one object. All truly great men have been remarkable for this characteristic: they have had one grand aim or purpose before them, to the accomplishment of which all their energies have been directed. It has been thus with every great statesman, warrior, poet, artist, engineer, merchant. Each has steadfastly set himself to do *one thing:* he has done it well; and thus has become great: while they who have dissipated their lives in vainly trying to do many things, have rarely attained to excellence in anything.

But if this singleness of purpose be the characteristic of true greatness among men of this world, much more is it an essential feature of the *Christian* character. The believer, more than all other men, ought to be able to say, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after" (Ps. xxvii. 4). This "one thing" which the Christian sets before him is *the glory of* God; and whatsoever he does, he does, or ought to do, for that end. There is nothing in this concentration of purpose inconsistent with the attainment of earthly distinction; on the contrary, the most effectual way in which any man can glorify God in this life is by doing his duty faithfully in his station—by employing all his energies in the work that God has given him to do. It glorifies God, when His people, who profess to walk by His laws, and to do His will, surpass other men. It glorifies God, when it is made manifest that the religion which He has

given for the guidance of men, does really, when embraced with sincerity, make men better—not only in theory—not only with reference to a future world—but better now; that it makes them better statesmen, better soldiers, better merchants, better labourers, than other men. To have a single eye to God's glory does not mean going about with a pre-occupied mind, engaging in daily labour because self and family cannot be supported without it, but with a feeling of irksomeness and disgust, as though it were an employment unsuited to an heir of immortality, and seizing every hour that can be spared from toil, and hours also that ought not to be spared, on the plea of engaging in devotional exercises; this is dishonouring God under pretence of serving Him: it is bringing robbery for burnt-offering. Devout Christians often seriously misapprehend their duty in this matter, and with an idea of cultivating greater spirituality of mind, and subduing the love of the world in their hearts, neglect the most obvious duties, and so come short of the glory of God. Every man that desires to do anything well, must do it heartily. And it is possible that two men, in the same field, or in the same shop, or in the same profession, shall work, both alike heartily, and yet the one shall be a true Christian, and the other not. It is the motive that distinguishes them. The Christian works heartily, *as to the Lord, and not unto men.* The object of the other man is his own profit, honour, or fame. These with the Christian are secondary; his great aim is to please God; and he knows that of the Lord he shall receive the reward of the inheritance, for he serves the Lord Christ (Col. iii. 23, 24).

But purity also implies CLEANNESS. This is opposed to impurity or pollution. A thing may be pure in the

sense of being free from adulteration, and yet may not be *clean.* The purest gold may become dim : the silver that has undergone the refiner's fire may be tarnished. And so, a man may be single-minded as regards the simplicity with which he devotes himself to one pursuit, and yet may not be clean, either as to the motives which actuate him, or the means which he employs. And if we bear in mind that by nature every man is polluted—that we bring a tainted existence into the world with us —it will be evident that in this sense there can be no purity in the heart of the natural man. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" *Not one.* The children of impure fathers and mothers are themselves of necessity impure ; and this inherited impurity affects their whole life and conversation. Hence, though the unregenerate man of this world has often attained distinction by purity of aim, in that he has given his undivided attention to one thing ; yea, though his efforts to achieve his end have been perfectly honourable and unexceptionable, according to worldly ethics ; yet he cannot be said to be "pure in heart," in the full sense of the words, because he is not *clean ;* his motives are stained with selfishness in some shape or other, and his course of action, however extolled by men, who judge only by the outward appearance, will not bear the test of God's law, or the scrutiny of His all-seeing eye, "for the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins" (Ps. vii. 9). There is always some latent idolatry, some cherished lust, some bosom sin, which defiles his best deeds, and mars the inner integrity of a life which to the superficial world has appeared all that is great and glorious. "The ploughing of the wicked," says the wise man, "is sin" (Prov. xxi. 4) ; the daily labour of the unregenerate man is tainted with sin, because he labours

for himself, and not unto the Lord.* Nay, the very services of religion, when performed with hearts thus disordered and impure, are an abomination to the Lord (Prov. xv. 8; xxviii. 9); and when such worshippers spread forth their hands, He hideth His eyes from them (Isa. i. 10–15).

Purity in heart may therefore be understood as implying singleness and tenacity in pursuing the Christian's one object, all relations and occupations of this life being subordinated to the glory of God, and the heart cleansed and renewed unto good works. "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in His holy place?" The answer of the Spirit to this searching enquiry is, "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart" (Ps. xxiv. 3, 4). Purity in heart must be evidenced by purity in the life; and he that cometh to offer sacrifice before the high and holy God must see that he lifts up holy hands.

We may now inquire, How is this purity in heart to be attained?

By nature our hearts are unclean: our actions full of guilt and pollution: no attempts of ours to purify these evil and bitter fountains can avail. "If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands ever so clean,"

* "Works done before the grace of Christ, and the inspiration of His Spirit, are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ . . . . yea, rather, for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they have the nature of sin."—*13th Article, Church of England.*

"Works done by unregenerate men, although, for the matter of them, they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others; yet, because they proceed not from a heart purified by faith; nor are done in a right manner, according to the word; nor to a right end, the glory of God; they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God."—*Westminster Confession*, chap. xvi. 7.

exclaims the patriarch Job, "yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me" (Job ix. 30, 31). The same sentiment is echoed by the Temanite—"What is man, that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? Behold, He putteth no trust in His saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in His sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water!" (Job xv. 14–16). But, notwithstanding the reiterated testimony of God's word, and the witness of conscience, proud man is very slow to accept the unflattering truth, that from the sole of the foot to the crown of the head there is no soundness in him. Yet this conviction of our natural guilt and uncleanness is the very first step towards the attainment of a pure heart? And the second step is the conviction that we cannot effectually cleanse ourselves.

Few men are really convinced of their inability to make themselves pure, until they have tried the experiment, and failed. Many of the most distinguished Christians have left on record that, while they laboured under conviction of sin, they made painful efforts to attain a high and heavenly morality, and wash their own hands in innocency. Many of them have actually acquired great self-control, and increasing strength in the resistance of temptation; but all concur in testifying, that the only effect of these advances was to convince them more deeply of their own utter vileness. Such was the experience of Job, which the Holy Ghost hath caused to be recorded for our instruction. Few have ever attained to such lofty stature in the righteousness of the law as he; yet, when he was brought to contrast his own imperfect attainments with the infinite majesty and purity of God, he was forced to exclaim, "Behold, I am vile: what shall I answer Thee? I will

lay my hand upon my mouth" (xl. 4): "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (xlii. 5, 6). Such was the experience of a child of God in the remoter ages of the world: such has been the experience of believers in all ages. One, who was truly a master in Israel, has told us, that he was long engaged in endeavouring to commend himself to God by his own righteousness; but failure after failure at length compelled him to abandon the attempt as vain. He had striven with all his might to meet the high requirements of the Divine law, but that law rose in its demands as he rose in his endeavours, and "still kept ahead of him with a kind of over-matching superiority to all his efforts. His attempt to scale the heights of perfection, to quell the remonstrances of a challenging and not yet appeased commandment, was like the laborious ascent of him, who, having so wasted his strength that he can do no more, finds that some precipice still remains to be overcome, some mountain-brow that scorns his enterprise, and threatens to overwhelm him." *

Such is the holy, though ofttimes painful discipline, by which the Spirit of God causes the law to do its work upon us. Who, of all the sons of men, can say that he has succeeded in cleansing his own heart, and purifying himself from his sin? (Prov. xx. 9). It is not until he has been assured, by the failure of many an experiment, that the Ethiopian cannot himself change his skin, or the leopard his spots; not until he is convinced that of himself he cannot scale the heavenly heights; not until then is he willing to confess himself a helpless and hopeless defaulter, and to flee for refuge to the Cross of Christ. It is only when a man comes to know, that the purity in heart and life which the law of God requires

* Hanna's "Life of Dr Chalmers," chap. viii.

is utterly beyond his grasp, that he will take into his mouth the prayer of the Psalmist, "*Create* in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

It is a most glorious truth, which lies at the foundation of all our faith and hope, that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John i. 7). The Sermon on the Mount was not intended to unfold the Gospel scheme of salvation; but its precepts are all calculated to awaken reflections suggestive of saving truth. Thus the language of this Beatitude would lead our Lord's actual hearers to know their natural impurity, and the necessity of the cleansing blood of the Covenant. This is its lesson to every unconverted soul; and it teaches God's believing children, that if they would be truly pure in heart, they must be cleansed by Christ Himself.

Our blessed Lord purifies His ransomed and believing people, in the legal or forensic sense, by washing away their sins, original and actual, in His own blood. "If I wash thee not," He said to Peter, "thou hast no part with me" (John xiii. 8). United to Him by faith; all our sins laid upon Him; clothed with His perfect righteousness, instead of our own imperfect obedience; we are thus justified, made federally holy, and accepted as righteous in God's sight. But this federal, legal, or constructive holiness, is not all that the Saviour accomplishes for the believer. He is called Jesus, because He saves His people *from their sins*, and not merely from the consequences of their sins. He sanctifies them, or makes them personally holy, by the operation of His Spirit. This work is not indeed completed, until the believer is released from his mortal body; but it advances daily, and always with a vigour proportionate to the diligence with which he uses the means appointed. He purifies us by His word, by the ordinances of His sanctuary, by over-ruling all our experience for the

strengthening of our faith. He purifies us also by casting us into the furnace of affliction; sitting "as a refiner and purifier of silver" (Mal. iii. 3), and watching over us till He sees His own glorious image more and more clearly reflected in us, that so at the last He may present us to Himself as "a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and without blemish" (Eph. v. 27).

It remains to consider the blessedness which our Lord assigns to the pure in heart.

Even in the comparative purity which he can enjoy in this life, the believer experiences unspeakable blessedness, arising from the lively confidence, the peace, the joy, which are his undoubted privileges. These are the gifts of the Spirit, who is the earnest of our holy and heavenly inheritance: they are a foretaste of joys to come, and a sacred pledge that we shall hereafter enjoy them without hindrance and without limit. Thus it is that, even in this life, the believer's eyes are opened, and he is enabled to *see God.* It is said of Moses, a man singularly pure in heart, that "he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. xi. 27). So the believer endures. The eye of faith pierces through the clouds of sense and sin, and sees Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels for the suffering of death, sitting on the right hand of God, crowned with glory and honour (Heb. ii. 9). So Stephen, the illustrious martyr, saw Him; and the sight was to him a most sweet assurance that the glory which the Father has given to Jesus, Jesus will in due time give to His believing, suffering, and waiting people: that sight brought such joy to his heart, that even his bloodthirsty enemies, "looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel" (Acts vi. 15).

But our Lord's promise extends much further than this. "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God." There is more in this than the vision of faith, however the spiritual eye may have been strengthened. The chief element of this blessedness is evidently future. No man dwelling in a mortal body, can "see God" in the full meaning of the words. No man hath seen God at any time (John i. 18): no man can look upon Him and live; for He dwelleth in light which no man can approach unto (1 Tim. vi. 16). The visions of God of which we read in the Old Testament were visions of the only-begotten Son of God, who is in the bosom of the Father, and who appeared in human form at various times to the patriarchs, affording them glimpses of the stupendous mystery yet to be revealed when God should be manifest in the flesh. They saw God; but they saw Him shrouded in human form (Exod. xxiv. 9–11; xxxiii. 11, 20–23).

Nor will this promise be entirely fulfilled by the vision of the glorified Redeemer, when He shall come on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory to judge the world in righteousness. Then, we are told, "every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him." In this vision the believer and the unbeliever shall alike partake.

But the promise points to a vision of God which is the peculiar reward of the pure in heart. *They* shall see God, it would seem, in a manner in which no others shall be able to see Him. The vision of the glorified Redeemer will be a vision of a glorified human nature; and, transcendently bright as it will be, it will not fulfil this promise. The glory of Christ has, in fact, been seen by mortal eyes, namely, by those of Peter, and James, and John, on the Mount of Transfiguration. But the vision that remains for the pure in heart has

not been seen, and cannot be seen, by the eye of flesh. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1 Cor. ii. 9). From these words it is evident that whatever is implied in seeing God cannot be fully comprehended by us in this life. "Beloved," saith the Apostle John, "now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know, that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John iii. 2). We shall be able therefore to see all that Christ sees; and if it be true, that the angels that minister for the heirs of salvation do always behold the face of their Father in heaven (Matt. xviii. 10), we may be well assured that Christ, whom God hath highly exalted, far above all principality and power, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, beholds more than the angels behold; and to them that love Him He hath promised that they shall be with Him where He is, and behold all His glory, that they may abide with Him for ever. These natural bodies shall be raised as spiritual bodies; still human, but endowed with new powers suitable to a new condition of existence. In our glorified flesh we shall see God, as Job confidently anticipated; and there, in His very presence, shall be fulness of joy: there "His servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face; and His Name shall be in their foreheads" (Rev. xxii. 3, 4).

Let me look at this Beatitude in a spirit of self-application.

Can I say of myself that I have already attained the purity here commended? Alas! how miserably far do I come short, even of the comparative purity attainable in

this life! But am I following after, if that I may ultimately apprehend it? Have I suffered myself to think of this blessed purity as a thing so entirely beyond my reach, that I would make no consistent effort for its attainment? Let me look to the exceeding great and precious promises, glittering like morning dew-drops on every page of God's word. Of mine own self I know I can do nothing; but "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. iv. 13). To Him let me constantly look, pressing on towards the mark for the prize, and not relaxing my efforts until mortality shall be swallowed up of life.

None but they who are earnestly seeking after purity of heart can enjoy communion with God on earth: none but they who are made pure, even as Christ is pure, can enjoy that communion in heaven. The vision of God is for the pure only: neither double-mindedness nor uncleanness shall be found in the heavenly Jerusalem. As God is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity, so the impure cannot look upon His glory. Sinners shall not stand in the congregation of the righteous: they do not desire it, for they would not be happy there. But blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God. "Now, we see through a glass, in an enigma:" the glory that shall be revealed is too bright for us to look upon except through a veiled medium; "but then, face to face!" We shall gaze undazzled upon the very Fountain of light, and in that beatific vision find that all the most aspiring thoughts of our hearts have been far more than satisfied!

## VII.

## BLESSED PEACEMAKERS.

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."—MATT. v. 9.

HOW lovely is peace! In what touching strains have poets celebrated its blessings! In what eloquent orations has its eulogium been everywhere and in all ages pronounced!

And yet, in this, as in the other Beatitudes, there is much reason to fear, that the quality commended by our Divine Counsellor is not the same that has been extolled by the poets and orators of this world, and has awakened the sympathies of the unreflecting crowd. The sword beaten into a ploughshare and the spear into a pruning-hook, are images highly attractive, even to the mere worldly philanthropist; but few give themselves time to consider that the period to which those inspired metaphors are applied belongs not to this world of sin and sorrow and strife, and can never be realised until He come who is the Prince of Peace, and beneath whose just and benign sceptre "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa. ii. 4).

The only period in the past history of the world even remotely resembling the Reign of Peace foretold by

Isaiah, was the reign of the Roman Emperor Augustus, when the Temple of Janus, always open in time of war, was closed for the third time during the seven hundred years that had elapsed since the foundation of Rome. But the peace of the Augustan age was produced by means which forbid the Christian moralist to say, Blessed was he that made it! It was the result of long and sanguinary wars, in which the contest was not so much for any principle of right as for personal supremacy; in which corrupt political tactics were employed quite as extensively as those of the camp; in which the ambition of the first Cæsar, quenched in his own blood, culminated in the person of the second—second in every sense—before whom the liberties of mankind fell prostrate, because there was no longer an arm to strike for their defence. There was universal peace, for the simple reason that one man had by force and intrigue seated himself in the chair of universal Empire, and none survived bold enough or strong enough to dispute his title.

Yet, notwithstanding the questionable means by which this peace was brought about, the Augustan age* was the happiest the Gentile world had ever experienced. With the one exception of Judah and Israel under Solomon, a thousand years previously, nothing like it had ever been known in the world. Augustus, though he had many defects of character, and personally was neither good nor great, proved a wise and humane ruler, well suited to the age in which he lived, and under him the arts of peace and refinement flourished and attained a high degree of excellence. Literature and philosophy

* The battle of Actium, which gave to Octavianus Cæsar the throne of the world, was fought B.C. 31. The emperor, on whom the title of Augustus was bestowed by the obsequious senate, died A.D. 14. The Augustan age continued therefore about 44 years. The Temple of Janus was shut by order of Augustus in the very year that JESUS was born.

were encouraged and fostered beyond all previous experience; and, in a word, this Augustan peace, though unhappily of brief duration, was the most favourable example ever exhibited of *peace on worldly principles.* The world had done all it knew; but the world, with all its wisdom, knew not God; and therefore could know nothing aright.

It was at this very crisis, the fulness of time designated in the Eternal Purpose having come, that God sent forth His only-begotten Son.

He came, a King, but bearing neither sword nor sceptre; a COUNSELLOR, but displaying none of the insignia of office. He came, the Mighty God veiled in human flesh, a tender infant hushed on the bosom of His virgin mother, a man touched with a feeling of every human infirmity. He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor: He was Lord of all, yet He emptied Himself of His glory, and took upon Him the form of a servant.

He came, to teach men what they had never known, and never could have known without His teaching. He came, an Ambassador to a rebellious province in arms against its rightful Sovereign, to slay all enmities (Eph. ii. 16), and lay the foundations of a solid and enduring peace. At a time when the world was, to outward appearance, in the enjoyment of peace, Jesus came, to teach men what peace really meant, and on what principles alone it could be righteously, and therefore permanently, established and maintained. At the very time when the sons of men fancied they had found rest under the wings of the Roman eagle, the King of kings was born in Bethlehem, and the herald-angels who announced his birth rebuked the popular delusion, and called upon all to hear Him who was about to speak from heaven, and to show that "Peace on earth and

good-will towards men" could only exist in harmony with the Glory of God in the highest.

The Beatitude before us invites us to consider the blessedness of peacemaking—of that disposition which inclines a man, so far as it lies with himself, to live peaceably with other men, and to promote peace between those who are at variance. Truly a noble disposition! and one which produces the most blessed effects, both on the lives of individual men, in communities, and in the Church of Christ.

Let us first consider peacemaking *with reference to individuals*—peacemaking, that is, between man and man, as opposed to that spirit of wrath and contention which is the offspring of sin.

It is not to be denied that worldly men, who make no pretension whatever to evangelical sentiments, are frequently of a peaceable disposition. Just as many men are constitutionally merciful, and shrink from sights and sounds of suffering, so many are likewise constitutionally peaceful, and shrink with genuine dislike from scenes of strife. They really love peace and quietness: they are not quarrelsome themselves, and do not willingly enter the society of those that are so. If neighbours quarrel, they carefully abstain from interfering; and if they cannot be the friends of both, are content to be the friends of neither. This non-interference however is not peacemaking. It may keep peace, though not always, for ourselves; but it does not make peace between others. There is, no doubt, a kind of meddling with strifes in which we have no concern, which is justly condemned (Prov. xxvi. 17). Such injudicious meddlers generally make matters worse, and bring upon themselves the resentment of both parties.

Peacemaking is a very different thing from ultroneous

meddling, which often proceeds from mere vanity, or the desire of appearing in a popular character. The man who seeks and endeavours to make peace must be actuated by far higher motives, and have regard to far higher ends. The reconciliation of others is often a very thankless office, but surely it is the duty of every Christian to attempt it, and to contrive opportunities for his attempts. And it is not always so difficult as may appear. When individuals are at variance, it not unfrequently happens that the unkindly feelings are entirely on one side—one of the parties having taken offence when none had been intended by the other. More frequently there is a fault on both sides, each party thinking and saying the harshest things of the other with very slight cause. In the former case the duty of the peacemaker is comparatively easy: the offended party may generally be pacified by the prudent and loving intervention of a Christian friend, and a warm shake of the hand in most cases will effectually heal the breach. In the other case, however, where there is exasperation on both sides, peace is not usually made either so easily or so speedily. Some time must be allowed for the mutual irritation to subside, which will be longer or shorter according to the temperaments of the parties, and the circumstances of the case. It is, however, simply impossible for any man to maintain either anger or any other emotion in perpetual activity; and the most devouring wrath would soon burn out, if fresh fuel were not added to the fire by talebearers and gossiping acquaintances. The Christian peacemaker watches his opportunity, and instead of stirring up the decaying embers of strife, endeavours to quench them, by speaking well of each to the other. In this way oil is poured upon the troubled waters: more kindly feelings are restored: the parties become weary of alienation,

and perhaps earnestly desire to be reconciled, though neither of them will make the first overtures, fearing lest he should be repelled. He who is the elder in years, or the higher in worldly position, should always be the first to advance, as was admirably exemplified in the strife between Abraham and Lot (Gen. xiii. 6–9). But a wise and godly friend can often afford opportune and effective help in such cases, by bringing the parties together, and speaking for them those words of reconciliation which are in the hearts of each.

On the subject of Peacemaking *with reference to communities or nations*, it would be out of place to dwell in an exposition of this kind, which is addressed to private Christians rather than to political economists. It may be proper to observe, however, in passing, that the duty of promoting peace does not appear to be essentially modified by the circumstance, that the parties at variance are *communities* instead of *individuals*. The duty, at the same time, is very much more difficult to discharge ; for not only are the belligerents more difficult of access, but comparatively few possess either the knowledge or the influence to make their interference either acceptable or effectual. It should be remembered also, that war, though it is so fearful a scourge to mankind, is sometimes both lawful and necessary. Nor is it defensive war alone that is justifiable. It is necessary sometimes to repress the mad ambition of one whom the seething caldron of a revolution has thrown up to the surface, and whose march of death and desolation must be stopped, in the common interests of humanity. Many a time and oft has our beloved Britain stood forth thus, as the defender of human liberties, and the redresser of the wrongs of nations. In the wars that arose out of the first French Revolution, and were closed on the decisive

field of Waterloo, Britain was the disinterested champion of the liberty, not of Europe alone, but of the whole world. And so, in the more recent war in the Crimea, Britain played the part of a true peacemaker, by taking up arms in defence of the weak against the strong, and compelling the aggressor to abandon his iniquitous pretensions. In the case, however, of the fratricidal war which but a few years back deluged America with blood, the nations of Europe most wisely, and by common consent, abstained from interference, notwithstanding the serious injury which the war caused to their commerce, and the grievous famine which it occasioned in the manufacturing districts. In time of national war, it is rare that Christians can do more than pray for the restoration of peace, and for the mitigation of those horrors which are inseparable from the presence and movements of large armies. To such prayers we are clearly called by the whole spirit of the Gospel; and let us not doubt that God, in His own good time, will either specifically answer our prayers, or cause them to return, freighted with blessings a thousandfold, into our own bosoms.

Some years ago, an agitation was commenced in Great Britain by a number of gentlemen, chiefly members of the Society of Friends, with the avowed object of inducing the leading powers of the civilized world to enter into a compact, binding themselves to submit all national controversies, when such should arise, to arbitration, according to certain definite regulations. The projectors of this scheme hoped by this means to prevent the necessity for war, and they merited all praise for their pacific intentions. The leading idea was very attractive, and received considerable attention and temperate discussion; but, unhappily, it would not bear the test of close examination. It would not be impossible

that the smaller states should accept the mediation, and submit to the arbitration, of the more powerful; but who shall be the arbitrators when the more powerful states themselves are embroiled? It is hardly conceivable that any two of the first-rate powers would tolerate the intervention of a third, or mutually consent to an adjustment of disputed claims by arbitration. Or if they did consent, there could be no guarantee for the finality of the decision; and such being the case, it is not probable that any first-rate power would consent to arbitrate. In short, the difficulties in the way are so many and so great, that those whose political and diplomatic experience entitles them to offer an opinion on such questions, appear to have decided, that the proposal of the Peace Society is merely a pleasant theory, affording a fertile topic for popular declamation, but which the passions of men would never suffer to be reduced to practice.

A much more important branch of the subject remains to be considered—a branch in which every true Christian man and woman has a direct concern—namely, the duty of Peacemaking *with reference to Churches.* A full discussion of the various questions connected with this branch of the subject would require a much larger space than can here be allotted to it. For the present purpose it may suffice to offer a few general remarks.

It may be presumed, that every professing Christian acknowledges, that *controversy* is an evil. Nevertheless, it is very frequently a necessary duty. We are bound, as good soldiers of Christ, following the standard of the great Captain of our salvation, to be "valiant for the truth upon the earth" (Jer. ix. 3), and to "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). God Himself has taught us, by His dealings with man in the matter of redemption, that righteous-

ness must first be established before peace can be proclaimed—that righteousness and peace can only kiss each other, when a platform of truth has been prepared, whereon both may stand. This is the rule for the Christian peacemaker. The vindication of the truth of God, and of the obligation of His holy law, is the first consideration; and he who sacrifices these for the sake of mere outward peace, sacrifices the substance for the shadow. "Is it peace, Jehu?" was the question of Joram. "What peace," was the immediate reply of the zealous champion of truth—"What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?" The Christian champion is not authorized to follow the example of Jehu in slaying the prophets of Baal with the sword; but, nevertheless, he may not make peace, or enter into any treacherous compromise with them. His duty is to endeavour to bring the enemies of the truth to an acknowledgment of their errors, and to prevent the dissemination of false doctrines and the spread of immoral practices, by a faithful exhibition of the truth itself, and thus commending himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God (2 Cor. iv. 2; compare 2 Cor. x. 3–6; 2 Tim. ii. 23–26).

It may be presumed, also, that every professing Christian, whose profession is anything more than nominal, regards *sectarianism* as an evil. It is indeed much to be deplored, that true Christians, agreeing on things essential to salvation, should be separated in church communion. And it is still more deplorable, that the controversies between rival sects or denominations have at times been far more fierce, and the animosity far more implacable, when the points in dispute concerned rites and ceremonies only, than when questions of vital importance have been at issue. From the beginning of the Gospel, Christian churches have manifested a ten-

dency to attach far too much importance to mere forms —to cherish with exclusive partiality those to which they have been accustomed, and to look with jealousy and dislike upon those to which others have been accustomed. And such is the repellent effect of this feeling, that, while many judicious men have long been of opinion that there would be no impossibility in effecting a union of the evangelical Protestant sects, provided Christians could only be brought to confer together upon the various points of difference prayerfully and dispassionately, those who most desire such union are almost afraid to utter their sentiments aloud, because ever and anon some new outburst of the old virus gives sad evidence that dispassionate examination and impartial conference are things for which the Churches generally are not yet prepared.

The mistake which seems to lie at the root of all sectarianism is, that *uniformity is essential to unity;* by which is meant, that Christians ought not to hold church communion with other Christians, who do not subscribe the same symbols or articles of faith, and observe the same forms of worship and government. This is a serious error, and will scarcely be maintained in the present day by any who are not bound hand and foot in the chains of an exclusive system. It is not indeed to be expected that uniformity in externals will ever be attained: it may even be questioned whether it is desirable. The constitutional peculiarities of men are diverse: their habits of thought, their education, their manners and customs, and consequently the stand-points from which they look at things, are widely diverse; and it is unreasonable to suppose that their views of ecclesiastical polity and ceremonies should not be largely modified by such circumstances. Sectarianism, in fact, as it at present exists, is far more a matter of taste and habit

than of principle: more the result of influence and example, than of independent judgment and deliberate conviction. In all essential and fundamental evangelical truth, the leading Protestant Churches are agreed: the points on which they differ are regarded by none but extreme and violent partisans as necessary to spiritual life. Why then should there not be at least practical and co-operative unity among the churches? What hinders that they who hold the same faith should not have visible fellowship one with another? Even if separate organizations should be found necessary, what hinders that Christians cannot work side by side on common ground for common objects?

Those who by the Divine blessing have been permitted to taste the sweets of union, after long estrangement and bitter antagonism, can scarcely help wondering at the comparative pettiness of the matters which had kept them asunder. It becomes the sacred duty of those who have been thus privileged to become peacemakers with reference to other churches. If a number of influential representatives from the leading evangelical churches would only condescend to look one another in the face, and take counsel together with an honest desire to roll away the reproach of disunion from the body of Christ, it is surprising how difficulties would disappear before the breath of Divine love. It is to be regretted that we do not yet see eye to eye with our Christian brethren in all things: it is scarcely to be expected that we shall do so until the Lord Himself shall appear in His glory, and repair for ever the breaches in Zion's walls. But there is agreement enough in essential things to form a basis for substantial union, or at least for co-operation; and no Christian can say that he is earnestly seeking the blessedness promised to the peacemakers, who is not labouring to bring about a

much larger measure of co-operation than at present exists.

There are many, no doubt, to whom such anticipations as have now been uttered will appear visionary. The most brilliant facts in the history of redemption have been received with incredulity, not only when prophetically announced, but even after they had actually transpired (Luke xxiv. 11). If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, we ought not to have much difficulty in believing that He will one day gather into one His scattered heritage, and that, as there is but one Shepherd, so there shall be but one fold. The dream of a catholic visible church under one visible head is not all a dream. It is a dream which shall one day certainly be realized ; not according to the vain sensuous imaginings of "Catholics," falsely so called; but in the veritable glory of the New Jerusalem, in that day when the LORD, Jehovah-Jesus, shall be King over all the earth—when there shall be One JEHOVAH, and His Name One ; in that day when Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited ; in that day when there shall be upon the bells of the horses, "Holiness unto the LORD;" in that day when there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts (Zech. xiv. 9, &c.)

This is the consummation for which the children of the kingdom wait in faith and patience; and they find encouragement and consolation in our Lord's words, "Blessed are the peacemakers." It is true, indeed, that our prayers for the peace of Jerusalem are sometimes not immediately answered : it is true that our efforts to promote peace, whether between man and man, or between church and church, are frequently unsuccessful; but we do not on that account fail to obtain the blessing promised to them that seek peace. "The fruit of

righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" (Jam. iii. 18). Whatever we do, in a spirit of peace, with an honest desire to do the will of Christ, shall be accepted; and the fruit shall be manifested in the growth of righteousness and peace in our own souls. Such prosperity shall be the reward of all those who labour and pray for peace. The blessed seed they sow shall assuredly bear fruit, not always, it may be, in the precise mode in which they may have expected its development in others, but always in the blessedness which it will bring to their own souls—filling them with that peace of God which passeth understanding—that peace which the world cannot give, and cannot take away. "The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever" (Isa. xxxii. 17).

The substantial basis on which this blessed peace of Gods rests, is the promise, "for they shall be called the children of God." It is usual to explain this as meaning, that *they shall resemble God;* as S. Paul, in the Epistle to the Ephesians (v. 1), exhorts Christians to be "followers of God, as dear children." So far as it goes, the interpretation expresses a truth. It is a very blessed thing to be like God, and to strive in all things to follow Him, as a dear child follows the footsteps and imitates the words and actions of its earthly parent. And in nothing perhaps is it more blessed to imitate God than in making peace. If we desire to do this effectually, we must endeavour to do it as God does it. Not by sacrificing truth and purity—not by a pusillanimous compromise of essential principles—but by fulfilling all righteousness. There can be no true peace which is not established on a righteous foundation (2 Kings ix. 22). The Cross of Christ has demonstrated, not only that true mercy is always in accordance with justice,

but also that true peace is always in accordance with purity. In promoting peace, therefore, on pure Gospel principles, and not on worldly principles, we are, in the true sense, followers of God, and shall receive the blessing from the Eternal. Only let us be sure that the things for which we contend, as conditions of peace, are really vital truths, and not mere *forms* or *phrases:* the spirit, and not the letter; the true kingdom of God, and not "meat and drink" (Rom. xiv. 17).

It is evident, however, that our Lord's promise implies more than merely that peacemakers shall follow or resemble God. "They shall be called the children of God," not simply as a title of honour, or because they are like God, but because they really are His children, by spiritual generation, and by the adoption of grace. It is a common form of expression in the Scriptures, to say, a man *is called* such and such, meaning, that he *is* such, or that he is accounted as such. So the Lord appoints to them that mourn in Zion that they shall be *called trees of righteousness*, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified (Isa. lxi. 3). Of the Lord Jesus it was foretold that He should be *called* "the Son of the Highest," and "the Son of God:" of John the Baptist, that he should be *called* "the prophet of the Highest;" and of believers, it is said, that they are *called* "the sons of God." Similarly, peacemakers are *called* the children of God, because they really are God's children. A truly peaceable and peacemaking disposition is a most precious evidence of sonship—an evidence that we "are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John i. 13). Spiritual sonship is not a figurative or imaginary thing, but a real thing; and it is the reality, and not merely the name, that is the promised blessing of the peacemaker.

Let us, then, as we desire the blessing, cherish the spirit, and fulfil the duty here enjoined, by endeavouring to live peaceably, and to follow the things that make for peace with others. So shall we be called the children of God, the blessed of the Father! Heaven is the abode of peace and purity; purity that can never be sullied, peace that can never be broken. Let us live as conscious heirs of this glorious immortality. So shall it appear, even in this multitudinous and tumultuous world, that we are sons of peace, the children of the Highest! So shall it appear, that upon us has descended the unction of the Holy One, even as the dews descend upon the mountains of Zion! So shall we be made partakers of that blessing of peace which the LORD hath commanded for His children, even life for evermore (Ps. xxix. 11; cxxxiii. 3).

## VIII.

## PERSECUTION FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

"Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."—MATT. v. 10-12.

THE two remaining Beatitudes, being of the same general purport, though with a slight variation in form, may be advantageously considered in connexion. The former of the two refers, generally, to those who are persecuted *for* RIGHTEOUSNESS' *sake:* the latter refers more particularly to the disciples of Christ, who would be called to suffer reproach *for* HIS *sake.* In the former, our Lord had respect to those who were living under the Jewish economy: in the latter, to Christians, properly so-called, the devout believing followers of the Lamb that was slain.

The principle enunciated is in both cases essentially the same: the blessing promised is also in both cases substantially the same; and it is unnecessary to add, that, like the seven Beatitudes already considered, these also propound a spiritual paradox, and express a sentiment wholly at variance with the popular judgment of mankind. It is doubtless perfectly true, that men fre-

quently and willingly encounter obloquy and suffering in the pursuit of wealth, or power, or any other corruptible crown; and, on the other hand, it is not to be questioned, that many persons, who are by no means under the influence of religious principle, will choose rather to suffer the severest hardships of poverty than compromise their integrity, or forfeit their good name. But the general course of this world, allowing full weight to all honourable exceptions, is opposed to suffering either loss or reproach for the sake of "a pure heart and a good conscience" (1 Tim. i. 5). Comparatively few, indeed, of the children of this world have a conscience so well enlightened by God's word, and so well exercised by the holy discipline of His law, as to feel any serious difficulty in adopting that course which seems most favourable to their temporal interests. They have their consciences well broken to bit and bridle, and they are rarely incommoded by any plungings or swervings from the track which in their estimation leads to wealth and distinction. The world's policy proclaims, "Blessed are they that swim with the tide, and sail before the breeze! Happy is the man who pleases all parties, and wins golden opinions from all sorts of people!" To the man of the world, all religions, all creeds, all churches are alike: his faith is that of those who sit in high places, wearing soft raiment, and dwelling in kings' houses. To him it is of small moment that a doctrine, or a rule of life, is clearly defined in the Word of God: the only questions he cares to ask are, Have any of the rulers or dignitaries received it with favour? and, Are its promoters and adherents themselves men of rank and influence, whose good opinion it may be of importance to secure? To submit to the loss of wealth or station, to suffer bonds or imprisonment, or finally it may be to die, for the sake of a doctrine, or a duty, which rests on Divine authority

alone, appears to such a man the wildest fanaticism. In his judgment, it is better, when the instruments of music sound, to bend the knee quietly, and worship, or at least seem to worship, the image which the Nebuchadnezzar or Antiochus of the day may choose to set up.

But the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. He who spake as never man spake declares, "Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake!" &c.

The Divine teaching contained in these verses, which may be compared with the parallel passage in Luke (vi. 22, 23, 26), may be conveniently reduced to the following *four* propositions :—

I. Christians are called to suffer persecution.
II. When the world speaks well of Christians, there is reason to suspect their fidelity.
III. The persecution which Christians are called to suffer gladly must be really for righteousness' sake.
IV. They who thus suffer are blessed.

I. The first proposition is, that CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED TO SUFFER PERSECUTION.

Under the general term "persecution" is included every kind of reproach or injury which the followers of Christ, as such, are called to endure in this world. It has justly been esteemed a very powerful evidence of the Divine origin of Christianity, that they who first embraced it did so, not only without any inducement of worldly pleasure or profit, but in the face of our Lord's distinct and reiterated assurances, that in the world they should have tribulation; that they should be hated of all men for His name's sake; and that whosoever killed them should think he was doing God service (John xvi. 2, 33; Matt. x. 22). Whatever dreams of temporal power and grandeur the Apostles might have cherished while they walked with Jesus—dreams to which they clung in spite

of His constant admonitions—these were all rudely dispelled when they saw Him hanging on the accursed tree, and exposed to the cruel mockings of the Roman soldiery and of the rabble of Jerusalem. And had the Gospel story ended with the Cross, they who had left all and followed Him might have complained, with reason, that they had been deceived. But He rose again from the dead, and showed Himself alive to them by many infallible proofs, thus declaring Himself to be the Son of God, to whom all power was committed both in heaven and earth (Matt. xxviii. 18; Rom. i. 4). The season of doubt and diffidence was now at an end. Having seen Him with their bodily eyes ascend into the heavens, and having waited at Jerusalem until they were endowed with power from on high, they began to testify of those things which they had seen and heard. From the very outset of their career they encountered opposition and persecution, but none of these things moved them. The stone that had been cut out without hands smote the kingdoms of this world, and brake in pieces their idols of gold and silver and brass and clay with a power that was not of man; and itself became a great mountain that filled the whole earth (Dan. ii. 35).

Christianity, cradled amidst fierce and sanguinary persecutions, became, within four centuries from the birth of Jesus, the prevailing religion of the civilized world—that is, of the vast dominions comprehended within the boundaries of the Roman Empire. But though persecution from without had ceased, the spirit of enmity which has always existed between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent was by no means quelled. The Mystery of Iniquity, which had begun to work even in the Apostles' days, but was kept in check by the Imperial power of Rome (2 Thess. ii. 7), was, before the close of the fifth century, which wit-

nessed the fall of the Western Empire, fully developed as an antichristian power, and that within the Visible Church itself. Eight or nine centuries of darkness succeeded, during which the pure faith of the Gospel was driven, so to speak, into the wilderness, and is to be traced only in the lives and writings of a few shining lights, whose brightness makes the gloom of those sad centuries all the more dismal and profound. The Reformation of the sixteenth century once more awoke the spirit of persecution; and the purity of faith and worship now enjoyed was not secured without long and severe conflicts, and sufferings quite as intense as those of the primitive Christians. Since the Reformation there has been comparatively little outward persecution; though the fearful history of the Inquisition, and the struggles of the Nonconformists and Covenanters in the days of the Stuarts, sufficiently prove that the old enmity continued undiminished in virulence, though its power was restricted.

In the present day open persecution is rare. It has been heard of in Tuscany, where men and women have been thrown into dungeons for no other crime than reading the Scriptures. It has been heard of in Madagascar, a land of darkness and of the shadow of death, only reclaimed for the Saviour within the last half century, but wherein a noble work has been done for the kingdom of God, in spite of the persecution of a heathen queen, under which many have nobly suffered for the faith. But these are exceptional cases. Satan does not now make war against the seed of the woman by fire and sword and chains, but by the more subtle and more effectual weapons of reproach and ridicule. And in order to keep abreast of the intellectual leaders in this age of progress, the adversary no longer employs the coarse vulgar shafts of the avowed Atheist or Deist, but

gilds his artillery with all the lustre of scholarship, and points his arrows with all the graces of rhetoric. In this way alone can any assault against the citadel of the faith in the present day hope to be successful. But even these insidious efforts are comparatively powerless with the majority of professing Christians. The chief readers of sceptical works, let them be as elegantly written as possible, are those who dislike spiritual religion, and seek to find arguments, or the show of argument, to justify their dislike. Among this class of minds such works do much mischief; but ordinary Christians are seldom tempted to look into them. The shaft which pierces most deeply the hearts of simple Bible-reading and Bible-loving Christians is that of calumny and misrepresentation of the truth, a weapon which Satan never wielded with such skill and malignity as in this pretentious age of refined intellectual culture.

The world, in short, which hated Christ without a cause, hates also His believing and conscientious disciples. "The world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not" (1 John iii. 1). The world, which seeks the praise of men more than the praise of God, and loves its present pleasures and ambitions and gains more than it regards the promised inheritance of the saints, looks with contempt and avoidance upon those who profess to renounce the world, and to have their treasure in heaven. The little flock, the sheep of God's pasture, are reviled, and all manner of evil spoken against them, because their principles and practice condemn the world, and write upon its frivolous fashions and pursuits the sentence of Divine wisdom, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." In this way, at least, "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall assuredly suffer persecution" (2 Tim. iii. 12).

And they ought not to be surprised or overwhelmed

when they are so called to suffer, for such, our Lord reminds us, has ever been the lot of all that have been faithful witnesses for God's truth. So persecuted they the prophets under the old dispensation. So persecuted they Enoch, and Noah, and Lot. They mocked them, and reviled them, and uttered hard speeches against them, when they warned the ungodly of coming judgment. So it was with Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and others, of whom the world was not worthy. So it was with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Though He "went about doing good," they said He was a Samaritan, and was possessed by a demon. And let it be remembered, that they who persecuted the prophets, and crucified the Lord of glory, were not always Gentiles without any knowledge of the true God, but those who sat in Moses' seat, and exercised authority in the then Visible Church. It was Jerusalem that killed the prophets, and stoned them that were sent unto her. It was Jerusalem that delivered her own Messiah to the Gentiles, to be scourged and crucified.

We need not be surprised, therefore, that what was done to the Master should be done likewise to His disciples; that the servant should experience the same indignities that were heaped upon his Lord. If they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of His household (Matt. x. 25)! The Apostles found it so, and were not overwhelmed by it, because the Lord had forewarned them that so it should be. And they in turn forewarned those that should live after them. "Beloved," saith S. Peter, "think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (1 Pet. iv. 12). And similarly the Apostle Jude: "Beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the Apostles of our Lord Jesus

Christ; how that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts" (Jude 17, 18). And the Apostle Paul, referring to the example of our Lord, exhorts the Hebrew converts to faith and patience:—"Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be weary and faint in your minds" (Heb. xii. 3). And it is only necessary to add, that as it was of old time, so also is it now; the enemies that oppose the truth the most pertinaciously, the mockers that gnash their teeth the most vindictively, and the sinners that contradict the most viciously, are to be found within the pale of the visible Church itself—the Pharisees and Sadducees, to wit, who at this very hour teach for doctrines the commandments of men, and make the Word of God of none effect by their profane and vain babblings, vending their poisonous nostrums without rebuke within the gates of Jerusalem, and in the schools of the prophets.

II. The second proposition is, that, WHEN THE WORLD SPEAKS WELL OF CHRISTIANS, THERE IS REASON TO SUSPECT THEIR FIDELITY. "Woe unto you," saith the Saviour, "when all men speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets" (Luke vi. 26). There were false prophets in Israel, who spake smooth things to the people, and flattered them in their idolatry and rebellion; who healed the hurts of the daughter of Zion slightly, saying, Peace, peace, when there was no peace. These lying prophets were in high favour; for the covetous and ambitious priests bare rule by their means; and the people loved to have it so (Jer. v. 31); for they were gratified with the outward pomp and semblance of religious worship, without being called to surrender their darling lusts. It is to this

"wonderful and horrible" state of things, over which godly Jeremiah shed so many bitter tears, that our Lord refers. And the solemn lesson to be drawn from it is, that, since there is an essential and inherent difference between truth and falsehood, and since those who love falsehood cannot but hate those who contend for the truth, whenever professing Christians whose business it is to declare and exemplify God's truth are found in favour with the ungodly, there is reason to suspect that such favour is purchased by a sinful compromise of principle.

It may be taken as an elementary truth, that light hath no fellowship with darkness, and that Christ hath no concord with Belial. The godly man and the ungodly can have no real sympathy or communion with each other; and, consequently, the professing Christian, who is found voluntarily seeking the society and courting the smiles of those whose whole course of life is of the world, worldly, exposes himself to the suspicion that he is unfaithful to his trust. The believer, who by his life and conversation maintains a consistent testimony against the maxims and practices of a world lying in wickedness, will be secretly hated by those who are condemned by his protest, which, though silent, utters a language that cannot be misunderstood. A believer may so conduct himself, quietly and unostentatiously, even in a position of prominence and responsibility, as we find so strikingly exemplified in the case of Daniel, that no error or fault, on which to fasten an accusation, can be found in him; yet the world will hate him for the very spotlessness of his fidelity, and will invent occasion to betray and condemn him even in that very piety towards God which is the source of his integrity towards man. The Word of God assures us that it will be so: the experience of believers in all ages

proves that it always has been so: and, in a word, no principle of Christian ethics is more unquestionable than this—"The friendship of the world is enmity with God" (Jam. iv. 4).

If a believer, then, finds himself well spoken of on every side by the men of this world; instead of indulging in feelings of self-gratulation on such popularity, he ought rather to be roused thereby to greater watchfulness, pondering well his Lord's warning voice, "Woe unto you when ALL men speak well of you!" A man of whom *all men* speak well must of necessity be either indifferent to all principle, or a hypocritical "yea-and-nay" trimmer between conflicting parties. He is either a lukewarm Laodicean, who is neither cold nor hot, and cares too little about the issue of political or ecclesiastical questions to incur the hazard of offending any party; or he is a spurious professor, chilled with a breath from Ephesus or Sardis (Rev. ii. 4; iii. 1), who is vainly endeavouring to make the best of both worlds, and consuming his energies in the unprofitable attempt to serve both God and mammon. Let the believer examine himself. Before he listens with complacency to the praise of men, let him consider who and what manner of men they are that utter it. There are those "whose praise is censure, and whose censure praise." Mere popularity is a most fallacious test of merit; for the shout of the multitude is proverbially on the wrong side, and experience has often proved that the idol of the populace to-day may be its victim to-morrow. If the ungodly alone applaud us, or if we are so living that the ungodly can find nothing against us, we have reason to suspect that we are unfaithful—that if not actually denying our Lord, we are at least not confessing Him,—and we have need to take shame to ourselves, under

the reproving glance of the Lord's eye, and go out and weep bitterly (Luke xxii. 61, 62).

At the same time, while the general truth of this proposition cannot be controverted, it must be admitted that it is liable to abuse, and has in fact been abused. Because our Lord teaches us to rejoice when men revile us, it has been rashly and unwarrantably concluded, that to be the object of reproach and injustice is a meritorious thing. It is necessary therefore to add, by way of caution, that though there may be reason to suspect that all is not well with Christians when all men speak well of them, yet they are not, on that account, *to assume an offensive demeanour*, or to *court obloquy or persecution*.

The early Christians, erroneously interpreting the eulogies bestowed by the inspired writers upon those who suffered martyrdom for the testimony of Jesus, in many instances voluntarily denounced themselves to their heathen persecutors, imagining that, by suffering death as professing Christians, they would purchase for themselves a crown of glory. In later times the same spirit has been manifested by those who have thought that, as their Christian profession obliged them to be "not conformed to this world," they could in no way fulfil that obligation but by avoiding all intercourse with the world, and refusing to observe the necessary and seemly customs of worldly society. In this they plainly oppose themselves to the precepts and example of Christ and His Apostles, who, though they were as far as possible from being conformed to the spirit of this world, nevertheless did conform to the ordinary usages of society, honouring all men, and carefully avoiding all unnecessary offence. It would be a grievous mistake to suppose that the direct converse of the present proposition was true, namely, that, *if all men speak evil*

*of us, we must necessarily be in the right.* On the contrary, in matters which do not call the passions into play, the verdict of public opinion and custom may generally be relied on; and within proper limits, the esteem and approbation of our fellow-men may be accepted as a lawful encouragement. Such applause, indeed, is not to be the end for which we labour; but if we are enabled to benefit others, even in a matter of a secular character, and if we are honoured by the approbation and thanks of those whom we have benefited, there can be no reason why we should churlishly refuse to be spoken well of. A sound-hearted Christian will not be inflated by such fair speeches: he will find his true reward in the answer of a good conscience, and the satisfaction inseparable from the service of Christ, whether his efforts are successful or not; and he will not neglect an opportunity of gaining friends for his Lord, by the good opinion which he has for the time secured from those who have hitherto, it may be, been rather disposed to hold religion in scorn and contempt. And so far from a Christian being justified in courting shame, or provoking persecution, the example of our Lord and His Apostles is sufficient to show the very reverse. It is, on the contrary, our duty to use every lawful means to escape from violence, and to defend ourselves by all legitimate means when arraigned before worldly tribunals.

III. The way is now prepared for the third proposition, namely, that THE PERSECUTIONS WHICH CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED TO SUFFER GLADLY MUST BE REALLY FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE. Our Lord does not say, Blessed are they that are persecuted! Blessed are ye, when men revile you, and speak all manner of evil against you! The essential condition is, that the

persecution be for righteousness' sake—that is, for Christ's sake and the Gospel's (Mark viii. 35); that the evil spoken against us be spoken *falsely;* that it is for conscience towards God that we endure grief, suffering *wrongfully* (1 Pet. ii. 19).

The justice and necessity of this condition are so obvious, that it requires little more than to be mentioned. It is simply preposterous for a man to publish his own crotchets, either from the pulpit or through the press, and, because he is condemned as a heretic or a fanatic, to assume the character of a martyr. It is equally absurd for a common slanderer and disturber of the peace of the Church, who finds himself censured and shunned by the friends of peace and good order, to speak of himself as one suffering for righteousness' sake. Such has been the policy of heretics and schismatics from the beginning. All who have opposed their peculiar views, and resisted their demands, however unreasonable, have been reviled as the enemies of righteousness; and those who were bound to take official cognizance of their irregularities and offences, have been denounced as men actuated by the most impure and unworthy motives. It is to be hoped that Christians in the present day are too well informed to be deceived by great swelling words, the offspring of defeated malice and disappointed vanity. They who do well, and suffer for it, usually take it patiently, committing themselves to Him that judgeth righteously; and we are assured that such patience is acceptable with God (1 Pet. ii. 20, 23). But the wrong-doer, who justly suffers for his misdeeds, is frequently loud and insolent in his complaints, and seeks by importunate clamour to enlist the sympathies of the undiscerning multitude.*

* Augustine has well said: "Martyres non facit pœna, sed causa . . . Nemo ergo dicat, Quia patior, justus sum," &c.

IV. The fourth and last proposition contains the conclusion of the whole matter: THEY WHO THUS SUFFER ARE BLESSED. If, in the faithful endeavour to defend God's truth, or to honour His law, we are called to suffer reproach or persecution, our Lord bids us "Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy." We may not purchase exemption from loss, reproach, indignity, or any other kind of persecution, by unfaithfulness to our Divine Master, whose we are, and whom we serve: when God says one thing, and man another, we must obey God rather than men. Such was the principle on which the Apostles undertook the grand catholic enterprise of evangelizing the world. They were brought before rulers and governors: they were scourged, and appointed unto death: they were made spectacles to the world, and to angels, and to men (1 Cor. iv. 9); but they were not shaken by these terrors: they rejoiced and were exceeding glad that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of the Lord Jesus.

If, then, shame or suffering in any form fall upon any of the Lord's dear children *for the same cause*, let them likewise rejoice! It is an honour to be thus partakers of Christ's sufferings; and the believer has, in these very sufferings which he is thus called to endure, an assurance that when the glory of the Lord shall hereafter be revealed, he shall be made glad also with exceeding joy (1 Pet. iv. 13). In seasons of persecution, the history of God's people has shown that special tokens of God's favour may be expected. In such seasons God has so refreshed the souls of His faithful ones by the outpourings of His love, and by the enlargement of their spiritual powers and affections, that they have become almost insensible to physical suffering, or at least oblivious of it: the darkness of the deepest dungeon has been illumined by celestial light, and the very instru-

ments of torture have seemed as the keys that opened the gates of heaven.

Blessed indeed are they that suffer for righteousness' sake: for not only is theirs the present assurance of God's love, and the earnest of the Holy Spirit, but "theirs is the kingdom of heaven; great is their reward in heaven!" Their persecutions and sufferings are not, indeed, in any sense meritorious in themselves: they cannot on such a ground claim any reward as a matter of debt from God. "The recompense of the reward" in the heavenly kingdom is, no doubt, a lawful motive for both active labour and patient endurance. It was to this that Moses had respect, when he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season (Heb. xi. 25, 26). But it is necessary to bear continually in mind, that God can never be under obligation to His creatures, and that whatever rewards He assigns to any of them, are purely of *grace*. It is God that enables us to endure, as well as to work for Him; and the reward promised is in no sense due to us, but is solely an acknowledgment of His own work in us and by us.

Finally, if we suffer as Christians, let us not be ashamed, but glorify God on this behalf. Not as though our sufferings gave us a title to glory before God, but because they are manifest tokens of God's love, and pledges of future glory (2 Tim. ii. 12). And "let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator."

# IX.

## THE SALT OF THE EARTH.

"Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men."—MATT. v. 13.

IN the Beatitudes, the consideration of which has now been concluded, our Lord, in opposition to the pernicious maxims of this present evil world, sets forth those characters or qualities which are calculated to make men truly happy. The exposition of the moral law, which forms the second main division of the Sermon on the Mount (see page 3), may be regarded as an expansion of the general principles enunciated in the Beatitudes; for it will be found that, in what follows, our Lord illustrates and enforces the necessity of cultivating the dispositions He has already commended.

As an appropriate introduction to this exposition of the moral law, our Lord reminds His disciples that they are responsible for such an exhibition of the spirit of God's law in the world as should lead men to glorify God, and to think and speak favourably of Him, and of His Word. He compares His disciples to salt, and to light; and intimates, that by their profession they are bound to perform in the world the functions indicated by these two comparisons.

The *first* of these is now to be considered; and for the better understanding thereof it will be profitable to refer to the parallel passages in S. Mark and S. Luke, which are as follows:—

"For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another" (Mark ix. 49, 50). "Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Luke xiv. 34, 35).

Salt, one of the most familiar products of the mineral kingdom, is used chiefly for two purposes, both relating to the common necessities of domestic life. It is used as a *condiment*, to give a relish to food; and as an *antiseptic*, to preserve it from corruption.

I. Salt is used as a condiment, to give a relish to food.

It may almost be regarded as a necessary of life, for food without salt is not only insipid, but unwholesome, whether for man or beast. Neither sheep, cattle, nor horses thrive on pastures devoid of salt, unless it be supplied to them by their owners, as is well known to all that have any acquaintance with pastoral life. And man, if deprived of this simple but universal condiment, becomes meagre and spiritless: his body becomes a prey to disease, and life becomes a burden.

Salt being thus the necessary seasoning of our daily food, it has been regarded from the earliest times as the emblem of whatever is vigorous, pungent, and witty in thought or language, or of whatever gives zest or relish

to human life or conversation. In the Scriptures it is used to denote that which forms the proper seasoning of the Divine life in the soul, namely, the power of Divine truth—religious principle—or, in one word, grace. Job, in the depth of his affliction, when the face of God was hidden from him, compares his life to saltless food. "Can that which is unsavoury be eaten without salt? or is there any taste in the white of an egg?" (Job vi. 6.) And the Apostle Paul writes to the Colossians (iv. 6): "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." A Christian, whose whole man is renewed in Christ, and enlightened by His Spirit, will give evidence of the vital change which has been wrought in him, by the vigour of his thoughts, and the wisdom, readiness, and aptitude of his remarks and replies in conversation. He may not be able to solve every difficulty: he may not be armed at all points as a controversialist; but he will always be able to give a pertinent and intelligent answer, with meekness and fear, to every man that asketh him a reason of the hope that is in him.

And because religious principle, the fruit of Divine grace dwelling in the heart, is the salt wherewith the Christian's whole life and conversation should be seasoned, therefore Christians themselves are "the salt of the earth." It is sin that causes the earth to have an ill savour before God, and to be abhorred of Him (Ps. lxxviii. 59; cvi. 40). Without the presence and influence of Christians, the world would be a continual scene of violence and corruption, with little restraint beyond that of mutual fear, and the feeble voice of unenlightened conscience. If the different countries of the habitable earth be compared with one another, it will immediately appear, that one holds a higher place than another in the scale of morality and order, just in pro-

portion as it possesses a larger measure of Divine truth. It is for this cause that Mohammedan Persia and Turkey, possessing some fragments of the truth, are higher in the scale than Pagan China or Japan, which have none, or so little as to be scarcely appreciable; and it is simply because they have more truth, adulterated as it is, that Italy and Spain and Russia are somewhat better than Persia and Turkey. Britain ranks higher than all, simply because she has more salt. True Christians form a larger proportion of the whole population in Great Britain than in any other country: British law is founded upon the law of God: Divine truth has a presence and a voice in the British Parliament: Christianity is the national religion, to this extent, at least, that a certain outward conformity to Gospel principles, and some observance of Gospel ordinances, are essential to ordinary respectability. It is just this handful of salt that seasons the whole British community, and gives it a goodly savour throughout the world. And whenever the national honour of Britain has been tarnished, it has been the consequence of her rulers forgetting to season their counsels and measures with the salt of Divine truth; even as Joshua and the elders of Israel fell into a snare and a disgraceful alliance when they took the victuals of the Gibeonites, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD (Josh. ix. 14).

The use of salt as a condiment has however suggested another figurative application. It has been regarded in all ages as the universal symbol of hospitality and friendship, and of the fidelity which servants owe to the master whose bread they eat. It is the property of salt to contract and bind together the substances to which it is applied; so the framework of human society is bound together by the noble virtues of hospitality, friendship, and fidelity. In the primitive and patriarchal ages, the

ties of hospitality were of the most sacred character, and had a significance and permanence of obligation which cannot exist to the same extent in the absence of the same necessities. Leagues or covenants of hospitality between host and guest were, among the ancients, frequently recognized as binding for several generations,* and the act which constituted the obligation—the seal of the bond, so to speak—was the eating of salt together; when this had been done the parties were sacred to each other. Among the descendants of Ishmael in the deserts of Arabia, living, as they do, a life of violence and plunder, the laws of hospitality are nevertheless held inviolable. The ferocious Bedawîn robber, whose hand is against every man, refuses not to entertain the stranger who claims his hospitality, and will protect at the risk of his own life the man who has eaten of his salt.

From this it is easy to understand how salt came to be recognized as the emblem of friendship and fidelity, virtues so closely allied to hospitality. It was a common proverb among the ancients, to say of two very old and intimate friends, that they had eaten more than a bushel of salt together. And similarly, of the fidelity of servants: to eat a man's salt, and then betray him, was esteemed the climax of ingratitude and perfidy. The adversaries of Judah and Benjamin, who wrote to the king of Persia to hinder the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem, craftily assigned as a reason for their addressing the king, that *they had maintenance from the palace*, and that therefore it was not meet for them to see the king's dishonour (Ezra iv. 14). The expression used by these plausible troublers of Israel in the hope of commending

* The well-known episode of Glaucus and Diomedes, in the sixth book of the Iliad, turns upon a league of hospitality made between their respective grandsires, Bellerophon and Œneus.

themselves and their insidious designs to Artaxerxes, means literally, in the original Chaldee, "because we are *salted with the salt* of the palace."

All this is full of instruction. By creation and providence we are God's servants, fed by His bounty, salted with His salt. Are there not thousands who eat God's salt every day, and yet are unfaithful to His service, and will not have Him to reign over them? Is not the habitual language of the men of this world concerning God and His anointed King, "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us" (Ps. ii. 3)? And if it be thus with mere men of the world, who acknowledge not their obligations, how much more grievous is the sin of those professing Christians who, though they are bound to God by solemn covenants both of hospitality and friendship, are nevertheless unfaithful! In the glorious Gospel, the King of heaven invites sinners to a feast: professing Christians are those who declare their acceptance of the invitation: they call themselves the friends of Christ, and in that character they surround His table, and feed themselves without fear (Jude 12). But how many are there, who thus eat God's salt, and even dip their hands with Christ in the dish, who lift up their heel against Him, and betray Him, for a morsel of meat, or a few pieces of silver! It is not such treacherous guests, friends, or servants, that form the true salt of the earth. Surely every one that nameth the name of Christ has need frequently to ask himself, Have I been thus guilty? Lord, is it I?

II. The second use of salt is, as an anti-septic, to preserve animal or vegetable substances from putrefaction.

This use of salt has led to its being regarded as an emblem of perpetuity and indestructibility.

We find that salt was an indispensable part of all the offerings under the Mosaic law. "And every oblation of thy meat-offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat-offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt" (Levit. ii. 13). And again, we find the following remarkable language used with reference to the assignment of certain portions of the animals offered in sacrifice, as the portion of the sons of Aaron: "All the heave-offerings of the holy things . . . have I given thee . . . by a statute for ever: it is a *covenant of salt* for ever before the LORD unto thee and to thy seed with thee" (Num. xviii. 19). The same expression is used also, at a much later date, concerning the promise of a perpetual kingdom to David and to his seed: "Ought ye not to know that the LORD God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, even to him and to his sons, by *a covenant of salt?*" (2 Chron. xiii. 5.)

The meaning of this language is sufficiently obvious. The sacrifices of the Levitical law were typical of Christ's one, great, and perfect sacrifice for the sin of the world, which sacrifice was the seal of the eternal covenant of grace. The sacrifices of the law were of flesh that was corruptible, though, being either eaten or burnt with fire, they did not go to corruption in the ordinary way; and the sprinkling of them with salt plainly indicated that they were figures or shadows of a better thing to come, which in its nature should be incorruptible, enduring unto life eternal. "A covenant of salt" means simply a *perpetual* covenant. The promise of a perpetual succession to his throne which God made to David, is repeatedly called "an everlasting covenant" (Isa. lv. 3; Ps. lxxxix. 28). David himself, in his last words, so describes it, and speaks of it as being "ordered

in all things, and sure;" as being "all his salvation, and all his desire" (2 Sam. xxiii. 5). But this promise of perpetual succession, we know, has not been literally fulfilled. The literal sceptre has long since departed from Judah, and from the house of David; but it did not depart until Shiloh came—that is, until Jesus Christ came, of the seed of David, and set up another kingdom, which shall endure for ever.

What a flood of light is thus thrown upon our Lord's words, "Ye are the salt of the earth!" True Christians, as the spiritual seed of Christ, preserve the earth from entire corruption and destruction. Had there been ten righteous men in Sodom, it would not have been destroyed. And many times, when the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel and Judah, we read that they were spared from utter destruction, because of the oath which the Lord had sworn unto their fathers—for the sake of the covenant of salt, which could not be annulled, until that better thing had come which was the substance of all the old shadows. Hence, even in the darkest days of their degeneracy, there was always a righteous remnant left in Israel, who feared the Lord, and waited for the kingdom of God (1 Kings xix. 18; Isa. i. 9).

It is so likewise under the Gospel dispensation. The earth is corrupt, and full of violence: its dark places are full of the habitations of cruelty; but there is a righteous seed, small and insignificant in numbers, yet exercising an influence powerful and penetrating as that of the salt, which *cures* or *saves* the meat upon which it is cast. It is Christian influence—namely, the prayers of believers, followed by diligent and patient effort—that, under Divine grace, restrains the development of human wickedness. It is the faithful few, washed with the pure waters of the crystal fountain, and sprinkled with the salt of the everlasting covenant, who present

their bodies daily before God as living sacrifices, and whom God beholds in living union with His blessed Son, in whom He is always well pleased: it is this little flock that stays the arm of the destroying angel, and preserves the world from immediate judgment. The darnel may not now be gathered out of the field, lest the wheat should be rooted up with it. The wheat thus stands between the darnel and the devouring fire: the believing people of God stand, with Christ, between the dead sinner and the living and avenging Judge, that the plague may be stayed (Num. xvi. 48).

There is yet another, and a very awful lesson taught by the use of salt as an emblem of perpetuity, which is suggested by our Lord's words recorded by S. Mark, and already quoted: "For every one shall be salted with fire; and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt."

This somewhat difficult sentence has been explained as referring to the self-denials, sacrifices, and trials which Christians must endure in keeping themselves unspotted from the world, and pure from all filthiness of the flesh and of the fleshly mind, and which may thus be said instrumentally to preserve them to eternal life. It has also been explained of the fiery trials which all Christians have in some shape to undergo from Satan, the world, and the flesh, and which are specially designed to have a purifying effect on their character, and thus to make them more meet for their inheritance of glory.

But in the connexion in which the sentence stands, these interpretations seem strained and meagre, and are far from exhausting the meaning. Our Lord is, no doubt, speaking of self-denial. He exhorts His disciples to cut off a hand or foot, or to pluck out an eye, that is, to put away, at any sacrifice, whatsoever causes them to sin; because it is better for a man to enter into eternal life halt, or maimed, or with one eye, than with

all his members to be cast into hell, "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." This terrible phrase is repeated with a solemnity of iteration that rises to the sublime; and it has been justly accepted as an unequivocal affirmation of the eternity of future punishments. The expressions, "everlasting punishment" (Matt. xxv. 46), "everlasting fire" (Matt. xviii. 8), "eternal damnation" (Mark iii. 29), and so forth, have been evaded, on the ground that the Hebrew and Greek words translated by the English "eternal," "everlasting," "for ever," and other equivalents, do not always mean *duration without end* (Exod. xxi. 6; 1 Sam. xxvii. 12). But, admitting that these words are sometimes used with reference to *this world*, the duration of which is indefinite to us, seeing that we know neither the day nor the hour of its end; the real question is, What do these words mean, as applied to the rewards and punishments of a future state? And no ingenuity of exegetical torture has been able to extract from these words any consistent meaning, save that which has been always most surely received both by Jews and Christians. The same words are applied both to the rewards of the just and to the punishments of the wicked, and there can be no pretext for assigning to them different meanings in the two cases. If "life eternal" means *life without end*, then, equally, "eternal punishment" must mean *punishment without end*. But even if there really were some obscurity as to these words, there can be none with respect to the passage in S. Mark (ix. 43–48), the language of which cannot be misunderstood. "The fire that shall never be quenched; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched:" if these expressions do not indicate that the punishments of the future state are *without end*, then there is no form of human speech capable of conveying that idea. The intense

significance of the language, in fact, leaves no room for doubt or cavil.

Standing in this connexion, can we doubt that our Lord's remarkable words in the forty-ninth verse, have reference to the same unquenchable fire? "Their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched," He repeats for the third time; and the words that follow assign a reason why the fire of everlasting punishment is not, and cannot be, quenched; and consequently, why sin should be checked at any cost. The fire is not quenched; "for every one" *that is cast into it** "shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt." Sin is an offence against the infinite God, and cannot be taken away, save by the infinitely meritorious sacrifice of Christ. The sacrifices of the old law were offered with salt in reference to this infinite and eternal sacrifice; and they whose sins are expiated by this sacrifice are made heirs of eternal life. But those who persistently refuse the great salvation, trampling under foot the Son of God, counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and doing despite to the Spirit of grace, have still the infinite load of guilt and condemnation resting upon them, from which they cannot after death escape: they must suffer "the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude 7). As they refused the one, only, effectual sacrifice of Jesus Christ, "who through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God," they must now themselves be offered as sacrifices to the offended justice of God; and as such they shall be salted with salt, or *made inconsumable and indestructible.* For fire itself shall salt them: the righteous vengeance of God, which

* It is obvious that "every one" can neither mean absolutely *every human being*, as Alford thinks; nor *the righteous alone*, as the older commentators supposed. It cannot without violence be applied to any but those included in "their" immediately preceding. *Their* worm dieth not, &c., for every one of them shall be salted, &c.

is the chief element of the eternal fire, is the salt which makes the children of hell inconsumable. All the torments which their guilty souls and bodies can endure through millions and millions of ages, can neither satisfy the justice of God, nor exhaust the sentence of the broken law. The uttermost farthing of their debt can never be paid; and as they would not come to Christ that they might have life, they must now remain as eternal sacrifices upon the altar of eternal suffering; hopeless and helpless; ever burning, but never consumed; always dying, but never ceasing to live; knowing neither refuge nor respite from the wailings of remorse and the gnashing of despair, for ever, and for ever, and for ever!

III. There is yet another subject, and one of considerable importance, brought before us in connexion with the function of Christians as "the salt of the earth."

"Salt is good," saith our Lord; "but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; it is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men."

The chief difficulty here is in the words, "If the salt have lost his savour." The common salt (chloride of sodium) with which we are acquainted cannot lose its saltness. It may be dissolved, and the solution exposed to evaporation; but the crystals that remain are even more intensely salt than the original substance. And precisely so, the soul of man, when once it has been made the subject of Divine grace, or salted with the salt of the eternal covenant, cannot lose its saltness. The savour may be much deteriorated or diminished by the corrupt influences of the world and the flesh but

God casts the true believer into the seething caldron of tribulation, and after a season he comes forth purer and stronger than before. The language of our Lord here is hypothetical, as the language of Scripture frequently is (Ps. l. 12); and He is not to be understood as teaching that true Christians may possibly be lost. He does not say that the genuine salt of the earth ever does wholly lose its savour; but, "If the salt have lost," &c. (Compare John xxi. 21–23.)

The salt known to the ancients, however, and which is still used in many parts of the East, was not the pure article with which we are familiar, and which is obtained either from mines, or by evaporation from the water of the ocean. The salt used commonly in Palestine was, and still is, obtained from marshes on the sea-shore, or from salt lakes in the interior, which become dry in the summer, and leave a thick crust of salt, which the inhabitants rake together in heaps, and carry away for sale or use. The following passage from Dr Thomson's "Land and the Book," p. 382, is interesting and instructive:—"Maundrell, who visited the lake at Jebbûl, tells us that he found salt there which had entirely lost its savour; and the same abounds among the *debris* at Usdum, and in other localities of rock-salt at the south end of the Dead Sea. Indeed, it is a well-known fact, that the salt *of this country*, when in contact with the ground, or exposed to rain and sun, does become insipid and useless. From the manner in which it is gathered, much earth and other impurities are necessarily collected with it. Not a little of it is so impure that it cannot be used at all; and such salt soon effloresces and turns to dust—not to fruitful soil, however. It is not only good for nothing itself, but it actually destroys all fertility wherever it is thrown; and this is the reason why it is cast into the street. . . . . No man

will allow it to be thrown on to his field, and the only place for it is the street; and there it is cast, to be trodden under foot of men."*

While, therefore, it is sufficient for the solution of the difficulty contained in the words "if the salt have lost his saltness or savour," to regard the expression as hypothetical, the considerations suggested by the character of the salt with which alone the inhabitants of Palestine in our Lord's days were acquainted, are not unworthy of attention. Looking at the language in the light of the facts mentioned, it would seem probable that our Lord did not intend His words to be applied exclusively to true believers, but to professing Christians generally—to all, namely, that have any knowledge of Divine truth at all, and are in any degree influenced by it—the *Visible Church*, and not the true spiritual Church, the members of which are known only to God. The inspired writers frequently use general language, accommodated to popular knowledge and habits of thought. Popularly speaking, therefore, the visible Church may be spoken of as "the salt of the earth;" and in the Scriptures, accordingly, we find those qualities and characteristics ascribed to the visible Church which strictly belong only to the true invisible Church, the Spouse and Body of Christ. And the reason of this apparent confounding of things essentially different is the simple fact, that in this world it is im-

* Maundrell, the traveller referred to by Dr Thomson in the above extract, states, that when visiting the salt lake at Jebbûl, he broke off a piece of the outer exposed crust, and found it quite tasteless; but the inner layer, *which adhered to the rock*, had the true and full savour. If Christians kept more closely to their Rock, they would not so frequently lose their saltness. It appears that refuse salt, being white and sparkling, was used for laying upon walks in gardens and elsewhere. Schöttgen says that it was so used for the walks in the temple, and that the disciples were familiar with the fact. But his statement appears to want confirmation.

possible, with infallible accuracy, to distinguish between the true and the false: the separation of the spurious from the genuine cannot be effected till the great and final day of account; and, therefore, they are necessarily associated together, enjoying the same privileges, and professing to acknowledge the same responsibilities, however imperfectly they may fulfil them.

Now, it is not to be denied that the impure salt, of which the Visible Church is to a great extent composed, does very frequently lose its saltness. Of all the Churches founded by the Apostles, scarcely one remains; even those that were conspicuous for their zeal and devotion left their first love, and in a few years their candlestick was altogether removed. And what has been true of particular local Churches, has been true also of many individual professing Christians. They have run well for a time, and have presented all the rich sparkling appearance of pure salt; but when the sun has arisen with a burning heat in the shape of reproach or persecution for the Word's sake, or when they have been exposed too much to the influence of a worldly atmosphere, or when the clouds of sense and sin have poured out their foul waters upon them, they have looked back, and then drawn back, and have at length sunk down into cold, sapless formalists, having the name of salt, but utterly destitute of savour—having a name that they lived, but being really dead.

Of what use are such Christians? Of no more use than salt deprived of its saltness. Genuine salt, in moderate quantity, has in it some fertilizing qualities: but savourless salt has none whatever; and is, therefore, not "fit for the land;" neither is it fit "for the dunghill:" it neither makes the compost better, nor is itself made better thereby, but rather worse. There is nothing to be made of it: it is utterly worthless and unprofit-

able, and in that state it is fit only to be trodden under foot, or cast away. So, empty formal professors are good for nothing. They are not fit for the land, that is, the Church, which is God's garden, for they yield no fruit, and only cumber the ground. In the society of Christians they show themselves to be utterly insipid. If they attempt to speak of religion, they condemn themselves out of their own mouths, yet see it not; as a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, which he feels not, or as a parable in the mouth of a fool, the application of which he does not perceive (Prov. xxvi. 9). Neither are they fit for the world; for they only make that moral dunghill worse than it is. Their inconsistencies encourage worldly men in sin, and prevent them from becoming Christians, while they give occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.

Is such a state of declension, then, beyond recovery?

To affirm this absolutely is not warranted by the Word of God; though, undoubtedly, there is reason to believe that the cases are few in which such recovery could be reasonably supposed to have taken place. Our Lord, be it observed, does not say that unsavoury salt is wholly beyond recovery, though the passage has been often quoted as if He had said so. All that can be fairly extracted from His words is, that, when salt has lost its savour, it is thenceforth, and while it continues in that state, good for nothing. It by no means follows that unsavoury salt shall be "salted with fire," and must necessarily dwell with everlasting burnings. The question, "wherewith shall it be salted?" does not necessarily imply that its restoration is absolutely impossible, but may mean only that such restoration is difficult, and not to be accomplished by the ordinary means of grace, or by the ordinary operations of the Holy Spirit. Even the impure residuum, which the

inhabitants of Palestine are wont to cast out as worthless, might be restored, if they thought it worth while, by thoroughly washing it, and largely admixing genuine salt with it. So God may do, and has done, with backsliders; whom, when all ordinary means have been exhausted, He has brought back by severe chastisements, of which the metaphor of entering into life halt or maimed is an inadequate emblem (compare Heb. vi. 4–8 *).

In a word, Is anything too hard for the LORD? Sometimes He has seen fit to turn "a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein" (Ps. cvii. 34). And in some instances He has made this barrenness perpetual: sometimes He sends forth the decree, "The miry places thereof and the marshes thereof shall not be healed; they shall be given to salt" (Ezek. xlvii. 11). For though salt, in small quantity, is beneficial to land, yet, when the quantity is too great it destroys its fertility; and hence salt is sometimes used in Scripture as an emblem of perpetual sterility (Deut. xxix. 23; Judg. ix. 45). But sometimes also God recalls Churches and individuals to fertility after long unfruitfulness. The histories of the National Churches of Great Britain, of the Church of Geneva, and of many Colonial Churches, afford striking examples. Solomon was a remarkable instance of backsliding, almost amounting to actual apostasy: yet was he brought back by the loving chastisements of God (2 Sam. vii. 14, 15). Lot, doubtless, had the true salt in him; but he lost his savour for a time, having loved the things of this world. God in His mercy recovered him, apparently by means of the very excess of abomination he was compelled to see and hear, and whereby his righteous soul was vexed from

* See Krummacher's admirable sermon on this passage.

day to day. He himself was saved from the devoted city; but his wife looked back, and so lost even the little savour she seemed to have. Like the ungodly cities themselves, she was given to salt: by the shores of the Salt Sea she stood for generations, a warning to all worldly backsliding professors. "Remember Lot's wife!" (Gen. xix. 26; Luke xvii. 32.)

But not only careless professors, but true believers also, have need to take warning. Let them beware lest they lose their savour. If God has given them the assurance of faith, let them not abuse it to the encouragement of negligence, but rather be the more vigilant, lest they fall. Though it be true that Christ's sheep shall not perish, yet they are commanded to watch and pray, lest they should perish. It is by zeal, fidelity, and watchfulness, with sobriety and prayer, that we are made meet for the kingdom. Hence the necessity for the exhortation, "Have salt in yourselves"—grace, that ye may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear (Heb. xii. 28). "Have peace one with another," is also added; for there is no salt where there is strife: the true salt of the covenant is then lacking.

Have I the true salt in my soul? Or am I one that has not been salted at all? (Ezek. xvi. 4.)*

* Said in allusion to a "singular usage among the Israelites, namely, washing new-born infants in salt water" (Jerome says they were rubbed with dry salt); "which was regarded as so essential, that those could have hardly any other than an ill fate who were deprived of the rite. The practice obviously arose from a regard to the preserving, the domestic, the moral, and the religious uses to which salt was applied, and of which it became the emblem." (*Kitto's Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature, Alexander's Edition.*)

Galen and Avicenna speak of this custom as existing in other nations, and assign various reasons for it. *See Calmet's and other Dictionaries of the Bible, under the head of* SALT.

Am I diligently striving to preserve a sweet savour before God? Or am I suffering the enemy to rob me of my saltness?

May the Lord season His heritage with the true salt of the covenant, for His Name's sake!

## X.

# THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.
'Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.
'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (MATT. v. 14–16).

WE have before us in these verses the second of those comparisons whereby our Lord, it would appear, designed to impress upon His disciples the responsibility of their position amongst their fellow-men; to teach them that they are not brought out of their natural state of corruption and darkness for their own individual benefit only, but that they may exercise a conservative and illuminating influence upon the world around them. He saith, accordingly, "Ye are the salt of the earth:" it it your business, in your walk and conversation, to illustrate the power of Divine truth, and thus, as much as lieth in you, to restrain the development of sinful propensities among men. Beware, therefore, how ye lose your own savour; for unsavoury salt is good for nothing.

The world, however, is not only guilty and polluted; it is also dark. Fallen man sits in darkness and in the shadow of death, ignorant of his true condition, and regardless of the means provided for his rescue. Regarding the world in its sin-darkened state, our Lord

compares His disciples to light: "Ye are the light of the world."

In endeavouring to elucidate this subject, it will be necessary to inquire, In what sense Christians are called the light of the world; and then to consider the duty enjoined, Let your light shine; and the end to be kept in view in the performance of this duty.

May God the Father, whose name is Light, and in whom is no darkness at all; may God the Son, who is the brightness of the Father's glory, and whose life is the light of men; may God the Holy Ghost, who searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God,—command the light to shine out of this world's darkness, that men may see the true light, and walk therein to the salvation of their souls!

I. We are first to inquire, In what sense are professing Christians the light of the world?

It may be taken for granted in this case, as in the former one, and indeed throughout the whole of this discourse, that our Lord is speaking of professing Christians generally, that is, of the Visible Church; a mixed community, consisting of true believers, and also of a large proportion of such as are believers only in name. These last are neither the salt of the earth, nor the light of the world, in the strict and proper meaning of those terms: their salt never had the true savour: the light that is in them is darkness. But, as the separation of the false from the true cannot be effectually accomplished in this world; and as we are forbidden to attempt it, except for purposes of discipline, in gross and scandalous cases (comp. Matt. xiii. 29; 1 Cor. v. 13); all those outwardly in communion with the Visible Church are dealt with in God's Word on the assumption that they really are what they profess to be; and every

man is exhorted, and is in conscience bound, to examine himself, whether he be in the faith. Such comparisons as those now under consideration furnish professing Christians with the means of self-examination. If any man, professing to belong to Christ, does not possess the character, and perform the functions, which our Lord here assigns to His disciples, he has grave reasons for questioning the genuineness of his discipleship.

The true spiritual light of the world is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. John the Baptist was a burning and a shining light; and the people among whom he ministered were willing for a season to rejoice in his light; yet he was not the true light; but was sent to bear witness of that light. That was the true light which, coming into the world, lighteth every man (John i. 7, 8, Gk.) In a similar sense, the prophets of the old dispensation, and the Apostles, as also their lawful successors, the faithful pastors of the Church, are lights, because they bear witness of the true light. Christ is the true sun of the spiritual firmament. "I am the light of the world!" "I am come a light into the world!" "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world!" These repeated declarations of our Lord must not, however, be interpreted in a manner inconsistent with fact. Every man is not enlightened by Christ in the same sense, or to the same extent. But as all men, without any exception, are involved in the darkness and guilt of the disobedience of Adam, so it is true that, to a certain extent, all men, without any exception, are benefited by the obedience and death of Christ. "The many," that is, all mankind, are made righteous by Christ to the same extent that they became guilty by the fall of Adam; or, in other words the guilt of original sin is so far taken away by the work of Christ, that no man is condemned on that ground

alone. Infants and idiots die, which proves that they inherit sin and guilt from our common progenitors; but being free from personal and actual guilt, their eternal salvation may be most reasonably inferred; for though it is true that God does *in this life* visit the sins of the fathers upon the children, such visitation extends not to the life that is to come: with respect to a *future state* the Word of God declares, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son" (Ezek. xviii. 20).

But for the right apprehension of the truth that "Christ is the light of the world," while it is well not to lose sight of the sense in which it is absolutely and universally true, it is not necessary to understand it absolutely and universally at all times. Our Lord Himself teaches us to make the proper limitations. "I am come a light into the world, *that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness*" (John xii. 46); and again, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness; but shall have the light of life" (John viii. 12). "While ye have the light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light" (John xii. 36). And to the same effect we find the Apostle John testifying, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John i. 6, 7). It is evident from these passages that they only who believe in Christ, who receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation, and who are also walking in Him (Col. ii. 6), are truly and personally enlightened by Him. The sun that shines above us is the light of the natural world, yet it does not lighten absolutely

every man, for the *blind* are not benefited by the sunlight to the same extent as they are who have the blessing of sight. But, generally speaking, every man that has the power of vision is enlightened by the sun; and even the blind, though they may not know it, are benefited by the "sovereign vital lamp," which not only has a cheering influence, independently of the perceptions of the eye, but is also necessary to the various processes of animal and vegetable life, as well as of the arts and manufactures, which benefit the blind as well as those that see. In a strictly analogous way, Christ is the light of the spiritual world. Every man to whom the Spirit of God gives the faculty of spiritual vision is enlightened by Him: there is no other light by which any man can be spiritually enlightened; and even they who are not spiritually enlightened, but abide in their natural darkness, enjoy many blessings, though they may not know it, and too seldom consider it, for which they are wholly indebted to the Gospel light which has come into the world.

If the Lord Jesus Christ, then, be the true light of the world, it follows that Christians can be the light of the world only in a secondary and subordinate sense, as John the Baptist, the prophets and apostles, and faithful Christian ministers are, namely, by the testimony they bear to Jesus, wherein they appear as vehicles for the exhibition of the light rather than lights—vessels for holding the sacred oil which is lighted by fire from heaven, rather than having luminous power in themselves. It is not, however, to Christian ministers alone, but to the whole visible professing Church, that our Lord addresses these words, "Ye are the light of the world!" Every Christian is not called to bear active and public testimony to Christ by preaching the Word; but every Christian may fulfil the office of a reflector,

and shine upon the world by the reflected light of Christ, as the moon shines by the reflected light of the sun. The moon is not itself luminous any more than the earth: all the light that either of them enjoys is from the sun. While the sun is above the horizon, we regard not the moon, though she also may be visible. But when the sun has set, then the moon is the light of the world. In like manner, now that Christ has left the world, and gone to the Father, the Visible Church shines upon the world by His light, until the day dawn, and the Sun of Righteousness shall rise, never to set again.

Christians are, then, the light of the world; and as such, it behoves them carefully to remember that they are placed in a conspicuous position. By professing themselves the disciples of Christ, they profess to be raised above the things of this world, and to breathe a different atmosphere. Such a profession at once invites observation and challenges criticism. Men will look, some from curiosity, some from contempt, some from envy, some from hatred, to see who and what manner of men they are, who, while living in the world, profess to be not of it, but to have different tastes, different hopes, different joys, different objects of pursuit, from those of other men. Professing Christians cannot escape observation. They are as a city set on a hill, and cannot be hid.* They are as the moon, which God placed in its orbit, and appointed to accompany the earth in its course around the sun, to give light to the earth by night when the sun is absent, but yet to be apart from

* From the Mount of Beatitudes can be distinctly seen to this day a city called Safed, "placed high," says Stanley, "on a bold spur of the Galilean Anti-Lebanon." The city itself is of comparatively modern date, being one of the sacred cities of the modern Jews; but probably an older city or fortress occupied the same site in our Lord's day. A fortress is also visible on Mount Tabor. Our Lord possibly pointed to one of these.

the earth, and to have no contact with it. God has set His people, in like manner, apart from the world, commanding them, even while dwelling in the world, to have no fellowship with it in things contrary to His law. This gives to Christians a conspicuous and apparently an invidious position; but it is the position assigned to them by God Himself, and so long as they bear the name of Christ, and profess to belong to His Church, they cannot abandon it: they must be seen and observed, and cannot avoid it.

II. Such being the character, and such the position, assigned to His disciples by Christ Himself, we are further taught that it is the duty of professing Christians, the members of the Visible Church, to SHINE. "Let your light shine!" They cannot be hid altogether, and abide in utter and permanent obscurity: they must appear to the world, either as a luminous body, or as a non-luminous body—either reflecting the light of Christ, or intercepting and concealing it. The moon sometimes passes between the earth and the sun, occasioning what is called an eclipse of the greater luminary. So, unhappily, professing Christians, instead of truly reflecting the light of Christ, sometimes actually intercept it, and by their grievous inconsistencies and perversities, make the world even darker than it naturally is.

He, therefore, who professes to be Christ's disciple, must not put his light under a bushel, or otherwise hinder it from shining. A Christian may not bury himself in seclusion, by retiring altogether from the world, as the Essenes, a Jewish sect in our Lord's day, were wont to do, and as certain religious orders of the corrupt Greek and Roman Churches have done, on pretext of escaping from temptation, and giving themselves

continually to fasting, prayer, and meditation. Neither may a Christian hold aloof from his fellow-men, as one that has no sympathy with their joys or sorrows, their prosperity or their adversity. Nor may the believer refuse to co-operate with his fellow-citizens or neighbours in things lawful and expedient for the common good, be they temporal or spiritual. A minister of the Gospel is no doubt in a great measure restricted by his office to spiritual labours: he does not, indeed, forfeit his rights as a citizen, and he is not at liberty to surrender them, or evade the responsibilities involved in them; but in secular matters it becomes not him to be a judge and a ruler. Other Christians, however, are not so restricted: they are rather bound by the very character and position here assigned to them, to do their utmost for the welfare of the community of which they are members. It may be little, perhaps, that any individual can do; but however little it may be, let him beware that he neglect not to do it, and that in such a manner that the purity of his motives shall be apparent; otherwise he is guilty of putting his candle under a bushel. The Christian must take heed lest, from indolence or unworthy timidity, he refuse any duty which fairly presents itself to him in the course of Divine providence: to do this is what our Lord elsewhere calls putting his candle under a bed (Luke viii. 16)—that fatal sluggard's bed of ease, on which so many within the walls of Zion doze and dream their precious hours away, anon turning heavily, like a door on its hinges, and murmuring, "Yet a little sleep, a little folding of the hands to sleep" (Prov. vi. 10; xxvi. 14). Above all, must the Christian be watchful that he conceal not his light by any inconsistency of conduct. He is to mingle with men, not to do as they do, and encourage them by his countenance and example, but rather that he may throw a ray of

Divine light upon the world lying in darkness, and show its erring children the good and the right way. No man can do this with effect if he be himself justly obnoxious to charges of indirection and questionable purity of life. The Christian must let it be seen that his light is of heaven, and that he is governed by principles which forbid him to tamper with sin. If he goes into the society of his fellow-men, and they fail to see that his springs of action are not of this world, but find him in all respects such as they are themselves, it is evident that his candle, if it be lighted at all, is hidden under a bushel.

Our Lord further teaches that our light, in order that it may shine effectually, must be set on a candlestick. Throughout the Scriptures the Visible Church is compared to a candlestick, lamp, or light-bearer, because it is the appointed agency or instrumentality for exhibiting the true light to the world. And so, any local or particular Church is also "a candlestick," as being the special instrumentality in any particular nation or district for publishing the Gospel tidings, and administering all ordinances whereby the light is displayed to the eyes of men. While, therefore, our Lord's reference to "a candlestick" may be interpreted generally, as meaning simply that Christians must take care that they do not conceal their light, it is probable that there is here also a reference to the Visible Church, as an actual organization—as a means by which all may combine to do that which is the duty of each individually. The golden candlestick in the temple was fitted, not with one lamp only, but had seven branches, each bearing a lamp. And in the vision of S. John in the Isle of Patmos, the Visible Church is represented not by one golden candlestick, but by seven, Christ walking in the midst of them (Rev. i. 13; ii. 1). The number *seven* is

used in Scripture to denote what is *perfect* or *entire:* thus "the seven Churches of Asia" Minor are taken to represent the whole Visible Church. Wherever Christians are placed on the face of the earth, it is their duty to form themselves into an organized community or church; and to this visible community it is the duty of every Christian to join himself; for it is impossible for a Christian fully and rightly to discharge his obligations, unless he be visibly associated with the Visible Church. Every Christian ought to be a member of some congregation, partaking of the ordinances of religion in the society of his brethren, and thus receiving in his own soul that light which it is his duty to aid in diffusing throughout the world. It is not, indeed, possible to organize congregations everywhere—congregations, that is, in which the Word of God shall be regularly preached, and the sacraments administered—for in many parts of the world the population is much scattered, an evil which is enhanced by the diversities of religious denomination, and still more by the indifference to all religion which too frequently prevails among such a population. But in all cases where it can be accomplished, it is the duty of Christians to form themselves into congregations, and work together in brotherly love for the cause of their common Master: the particular church, or denomination, or congregation, to which each individual Christian thus joins himself in outward communion, being the particular candlestick on which he ought to set his light, and from which it ought to shine. It is not intended that nothing can or should be done by individual effort; but, obviously, individual efforts can seldom extend beyond a man's own family or immediate neighbourhood. As a general rule, where an organization exists, or where there are materials for it, Christians ought to remember that they

are not isolated individuals, but members of a body, each member having different functions, but each contributing to the general efficiency of the whole. Where this corporate obligation is ignored or forgotten, and Christians in their united capacity are doing nothing for Christ, they are not shining as they ought: their candle is not on its proper candlestick, and does not give light to all that are in the house.

The "house" here spoken of, it must be understood, is not the Church, but the world, that is, the whole population of the earth. Christians are "the light of the world:" it is the function of the Visible Church to give light to all that are in God's house. It is not enough that they shine among their fellow-Christians, and are known of them to be in the fellowship of the truth: they must let their light shine before men; not only before those in their own immediate locality, but before all the world. That they may be enabled to do this, is what believers are taught to pray for in the sixty-seventh Psalm:—"God be merciful unto us, and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us!" And for what end is this prayer to be offered? Not merely that they who offer it may be themselves enlightened, but that, by their instrumentality, the light which God has imparted to them may be communicated to others —"that THY way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations."

III. The literal style of our authorised version has, in v. 16, given rise to a slight misapprehension of our Lord's meaning—a misapprehension which is to be traced in many of our popular commentaries. It is made to appear as if our Lord intended that Christians should *so* shine that their good works might be seen of men, which is in direct contradiction of His subsequent

words (vi. 1), "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men." No doubt, commentators are careful to explain that the seeing of our good works by men is not the ultimate end for which we are to shine, the true end being that they may glorify God; but even the appearance of ambiguity would have been avoided had sufficient note been taken of the Hellenistic phraseology used by the inspired writers of the Greek Testament.* The correct interpretation has been pointed out by Bloomfield, Alford, and other recent annotators. The word "so" should be "in like manner:"—Let your light shine in the same way—namely, as a city lying on a hill-top, or as a candle on a candlestick; and then, in order to make it evident that it is the second verb, "glorify," and not the first, "see," that expresses the purpose of the shining, read, "that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven." The sense may perhaps be conveyed in a paraphrase, thus:—"Remember that you are, as my disciples, placed in a conspicuous position: this position you must not shrink from occupying, but must give forth the light that is in you, with a constant recollection that the eyes of men are upon you, and that by what they see in you they will be led to judge of the character of the religion you profess. Be careful, therefore, that whatsoever ye do, ye do it for the glory of God, that others, beholding your walk and conversation, may also give glory to God."

There are, therefore, two cautions which it is necessary for Christians to bear in mind. The first is, that they must not shine to the end that they themselves may be

* The general reader may be reminded that the New Testament is written in Hellenistic, and not in classical, Greek. Jews residing out of Palestine were called Hellenistic Jews; and the Greek in which they spoke and wrote was, as might have been expected, largely admixed with Hebrew idioms.

seen, or even that their good works may be seen. The being seen is simply the natural consequence of shining: good works, however secretly done, will make themselves known. Nothing can be more inconsistent than for Christians to imagine that "shining" consists in making loud forward professions, or noisy demonstrations. We are commanded, no doubt, to confess Christ before men; but we are not to do this with sound of trumpet, and waving of banners, and flashing of torches: that is a sort of shining which serves only to make the darkness more painfully visible. Still less are we to shine by arrogant assumptions of authority, or superiority, or exclusiveness, however skilfully the assumption be concealed. We are to shine as lights of the world, reflecting the light of the Great Luminary; evidencing, by the pure brilliancy of our light, that we have indeed been with Jesus in the cleft of the rock. So let our faces shine! not the faces that we bear in our fleshly tabernacle, but the faces of our good works, which do not perish with our bodies, and are not, like them, confined to one place. The Bible, for example, which Christians help to circulate, goes out into all the earth, and its words unto the ends of the world. As individual men we must soon die, but our good works live after us, and may give light to generations yet unborn. Our good works follow us beyond the grave (Rev. xiv. 13); and though they cannot enable us to stand in the judgment of God, yet they will bear witness for us that we are children of light.

The second caution is, that Christians must not shine for their own glory. The sun does not shine merely that it may itself be seen, but that it may give light to the sons of men, to enable them to see and understand what they are doing; that they may by the light of the sun see the wonderful works of God, and be led to glorify

Him by seeking after Him, and doing His will. It is thus that God's Word is called "a light that shineth in a dark place" (2 Pet. i. 19); and Christians who walk by this rule shine in the same way—that is, not that the light may itself be brought prominently into view, but that the "dark place" may be illuminated.

No Christian who rightly apprehends the nature of good works will ever be so vain as to imagine that they can really bring any glory to himself. The good works that he does, he knows, or ought to know, are not his own, but are the fruit of the Spirit of Christ, working in him and by him. The strength with which he resists any temptation, or performs any duty, is just as certainly the gift of God, as are the bodily limbs which are the instruments of his volition. In the very nature of things, consequently, it is impossible that he can have any merit in any action, or derive any glory from it.

Hence, therefore, our blessed Lord teaches that the true purpose of our shining must be, "that men, seeing our good works, may glorify our Father which is in heaven."

If we shine so as to attract glory to ourselves, we are robbing God—not reflecting the light of Christ, but intercepting it, and causing an eclipse of the Sun. But if men, seeing our good works, are led to perceive that faith in Christ is a real power; that it is able to sustain the believer in seasons of affliction; to preserve him in the hour of temptation; to strengthen him while labouring patiently for Christ amidst the reproach of the world, the contradiction of sinners, the coldness and lack of sympathy of formal professors; if men perceive this, they will give glory to God, and not to our sinful, erring selves. Christians, in a very important sense, serve as beacons or lighthouses to the world: that is, by their knowledge and experience in Divine things, they are

enabled to direct men in their course, and show them what rocks, shoals, and quicksands they must avoid. But the mariner who steers a safe course by such aid, never dreams of giving glory to the lighthouse, but to the government or company by whose orders it was erected. In another sense, Christians, like the light of a lamp, or a fire in a cold night, exert a cheering, enlivening influence. They are ministers of comfort in a dark and sorrowful world. But as men do not give glory to the lamp or fire by which they are enlightened and warmed, but to him that provides it, and invites them to rejoice in the light and heat; so Christians, if they are faithful to their trust, will shine in such a manner that men, while seeing their good works, and receiving from them guidance, instruction, warning, succour, and consolation, and while not ungrateful to them as instruments, will at the same time be led to glorify God, who has honoured them by making them the dispensers of His gifts.

The lessons taught in these verses may be summed up in a few words.

If true religion be in a man, it will show itself: it cannot be hid. It is the nature of salt to preserve; of light to shine. If a Christian, therefore, is exercising neither a conservative nor an enlightening influence in the world around him, he has reason to fear that his religion is vain. If the grace of God be in a man, it cannot be inactive.

If the professing disciples of Christ are found walking like men of this world, interested in all worldly amusements, striving inordinately after uncertain riches, and not careful as to the cleansing of their way, how can the true light be in them?

Or again: if any of the professing disciples of Christ,

whether from cowardice, or false shame, or false humility, refuse or neglect to confess Him before men, or withhold their co-operation from Christian efforts in the cause of His kingdom, is any other evidence necessary to prove, either that there is no true light in them, or else, that they are hiding it under a bushel? How truly does this description apply to many Churches, especially in the Colonies!

Finally, let it not be forgotten, that the humblest Christian, as well as the most influential, is responsible for the due shining of his light. It is the duty of every Christian to go through the world with his loins girdled, and his light carefully trimmed and burning clearly. It is in every man's power to make self-denying efforts, to show kindly sympathy to others, and in all things to exhibit a walk and conversation such as becometh the Gospel. If any man do this faithfully and steadfastly, his light will shine, and will be seen, without any ostentation or pretension on his part; and men will thereby be encouraged to become Christians themselves. Let us not be discouraged, then, because our sphere is limited, and our efforts necessarily circumscribed. The smallest grain of salt penetrates and helps to preserve. The light of a taper at midnight is seen from a great distance; and "so" exclaims the poet,

"So shines a good deed in a naughty world."*

No good work is ever wrought in vain. If it produce no immediate visible effect, God will make its fruit manifest in due time. A cup of cold water given in the name of Christ, shall in nowise lose its reward.

* Merchant of Venice.

## XI.

## CHRIST THE FULFILLER OF THE LAW.

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

"For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

"Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

"For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."—MATT. v. 17–20.

HAVING, by the two emblems of *salt* and *light*, explained and illustrated the functions which His disciples were intended to fulfil in the earth, and the high responsibilities which consequently rested upon them, our Lord now proceeds to the exposition of the moral law, which forms the main subject of the discourse.

He begins by disabusing the minds of His hearers of an error, which appears to have prevailed at the time, and which is far from being unknown even in the present day: namely, that the Messiah came to abrogate the old religion, and establish in its room an entirely new religion. The Jews, under the teaching of their blind guides, had failed to apprehend either the spiritual length and breadth of the moral law, or the typical significance of the ceremonial law. And with respect

to the prophets, they had been wont to look at those predictions alone which foretold the future kingdom and glory of the Messiah, and which they interpreted in a temporal and carnal manner. The other prophecies, which foretold His coming, in a state of humiliation, to magnify the law by His perfect obedience to it; to finish transgression and make an end of sin by a vicarious death; and, by that obedience and death, to overcome the powers of darkness, and achieve that kingdom which should be the future inheritance of His ransomed saints: these prophecies they altogether overlooked and ignored.

With no less ignorance and perversity, though with less excuse for it, many nominal Christians in the present day encourage the notion that Christ came to relax the obligations of the moral law, and to make obedience easier. Their idea is, that the Gospel is a promulgation of a milder dispensation of the law; that the burdensome ceremonies of the Levitical code are abrogated, as being inconvenient, and not adapted for general adoption; that mankind are now called to the practice of a higher, purer, and less operose morality than that required of old; and that, though we are not able to attain to the perfect standard set before us in the Gospel precepts, our deficiencies are supplied by the Redeemer, who makes up to each sincere Christian what he lacks of perfect obedience, and thus presents every such man perfect before God, and entitled to the blessedness of heaven. Thousands of professing Christians hold views not essentially different from these, not formally avowed, perhaps, but inwardly cherished, and practically influencing their whole lives. They think that the Christianity of the New Testament is essentially a different religion from that taught in the Law and the Prophets: they think that Christ came to deliver men

from a grievous yoke, not of ceremonies merely, but also of moral obligation, and that the pardon of sin is now provided for differently from the Old Testament plan, and in a much less costly and cumbersome manner: they think that an outward observance of Gospel ordinances, an avoidance of gross vices, and a general belief in God's mercy through Christ, are all that are required of them to escape the wrath of God, and obtain the benefits of the Gospel salvation.

If Christianity had indeed been an easy, accommodating religion of this sort, it would never have encountered the opposition with which it has been met. It would, on the contrary, have been highly popular; for this is just the sort of religion that suits the indolent self-complacency of fallen man: a religion which leaves him at liberty to pursue his schemes of aggrandisement or pleasure in this world, without the crucifixion of one unholy affection, and with just so little attention to the things of God as he can compound for with his darkened but not utterly dormant conscience. That inward monitor, which is the law of God written in every man's heart, will not suffer him to be wholly without religion; and that religion, consequently, is the most agreeable to his corrupt nature which satisfies the clamours of the "still small voice" at the least sacrifice of personal ease and self-importance.

In opposition to these most erroneous, though plausible and popular views, our blessed Lord, in the verses now under consideration, teaches,—

That He had not come from heaven to earth to abrogate or destroy the old religion, and to substitute a new one, but to fulfil everything written in the Law and the Prophets:

That it was a matter of Divine necessity that everything written in the Holy Scriptures must be fulfilled:

That to teach that even the least of God's commandments might be broken with impunity, was a contravention of God's authority; and

That no man shall enter the kingdom of heaven, who cannot stand before God with a better righteousness than that outward and ceremonial righteousness taught and practised by the scribes and Pharisees.

Such is the teaching of Christ, our Divine COUNSELLOR; and it behoves all that profess and call themselves Christians to examine themselves, whether their righteousness is such as can enable them to look forward with hope to that kingdom which is not of this world.

I. Christ came, not to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil them.

"The Law and the Prophets" was a compendious phrase designating all the books of the Old Testament. It included both the moral and the ceremonial law, and all that was commanded and foretold in any part of what was then received as the Holy Scriptures, given by inspiration of God. The Jewish Church, or nation, was the divinely-appointed custodier of these holy oracles: the whole nation received it as their established creed, that these Scriptures contained the only authoritative revelation of the way of salvation: in *them* they rightly thought they had an exhibition of that knowledge which was necessary to eternal life. In proportion, therefore, to the attachment of the devout Jews to their sacred books, would be their alarm and indignation, when they were informed by those who sat in Moses' seat, that a great prophet had appeared, claiming to be acknowledged as the expected Messiah, but who, under colour of that claim, intended to establish a new religion, and to supersede or destroy the authority

of the Law and the Prophets. Had Jesus really announced such a design, a pious Jew, acquainted with the Scriptures, would have required no other proof of the falsehood of His pretensions; for in the volume of the book it was written concerning the true Messiah, that He should come to do the will of God (Ps. xl. 7, 8). The carnal and ungodly, the sinners that were then, as now, the reproach of Zion, might have been well pleased to have eternal life brought to their doors on easier terms; but they who truly waited for the kingdom of God, unhappily then, as now, a very small minority, would have known that this could not be He whom the Law and the Prophets foretold.

Our Lord was therefore very careful to disavow any such intention. His mission was to confirm the Law and the Prophets, in the only effectual manner, namely, by fulfilling everything that was written in them. He did not come to establish a new religion; for that would have implied that the existing religion, the rites of which He Himself observed, was not true; that the religion of Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, of Moses, and Samuel, and David, of Isaiah, and Daniel, and all the holy prophets, was not true; that the world, in fact, had been without a true religion for four thousand years. As there is but one true God, so there can be but one true religion; and it is impossible that there ever could have been, or that there ever shall be, another. The way of salvation is always and everywhere the same. From the day of man's first disobedience, which brought the whole race under the curse of the broken law, there never has been but one way in which the sinner could find acceptance with God, namely, by faith in the perfect righteousness and sacrifice of the Incarnate Son of God. Before Christ came in the flesh, men believed in a Saviour and a King who was yet to come: since that

day we believe in a Saviour who has come, and in a King who shall come hereafter: the same Divine Person, and the same salvation, were the hope of the patriarchs and prophets, that are now the objects of the faith and hope of the Christian Church.

The Lord Jesus Christ came and dwelt in a tabernacle of human flesh, that He might accomplish, as facts, everything that had been written concerning Him, whether in the types and shadows of the ceremonial law, or the more express predictions of the prophets, and also to establish a perfect human righteousness by His own spotless obedience to the moral law. He came, not to destroy either the moral or the ceremonial law, but to fulfil both in every particular. He fulfilled the ceremonial law by submitting to its obligations, and scrupulously performing them. His adversaries never ventured to charge Him with any breach of the law as it was written in the books of Moses; all that they could allege against Him was that Himself and His disciples transgressed the traditions of the elders; a transgression which He did not deny, but rather justified, on the ground that these traditions not only were of mere human authority, but also in many cases made void the commandments of God (Mark vii. 1–13). Those very practices which the scribes and Pharisees enjoined as binding on the conscience, were mere commandments of men; and it is most instructive to observe that our Lord disregarded those traditionary ordinances of the elders, and solemnly rebuked those who imposed such unwarranted burdens upon men's shoulders. It is by means of similar traditionary ordinances, for which there exists not a shadow of Divine authority, that the Romish and Greek Churches have been corrupted; and in protesting against those corruptions, and refusing to acknowledge any observance as

of *permanent religious obligation* which is not commanded in the Word of God, the Reformed Churches have simply followed the teaching of Christ and His Apostles (Col. ii. 20–22 ; Titus i. 14.)

Christ came to fulfil the whole law of God ; not what man gave forth as law, but what God Himself had given forth. He exhibited in His own Person, in His righteousness, His sufferings, His death, His resurrection, and ascension, the substance of all the types and shadows of the Levitical ceremonial. These being fulfilled, the purpose for which they had been appointed was accomplished, and no reason existed for their continued observance. But the abolition of these was not the destruction of the Law. The Law, in its true spiritual significance, remained: only the form was changed, the substance was set before men instead of the shadow. Our Lord took away that which was rudimentary and illustrative, and which had been designed for mankind while passing through a state of nonage and pupilage, and substituted in its room that which was suited to a more mature age. The heavenly things themselves were brought down to the children of men, and there was no longer any need for the patterns.

Christ also fulfilled the whole moral law. He sought no relaxation of its most stringent obligations. He loved the Lord His God with all His heart, and with all His soul, and with all His strength, and with all His mind, and His neighbour as Himself—yea, better than Himself ; for while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. v. 8).

II. There are, however, some things written in the Old Testament Scriptures which are not yet fulfilled. The term "Law," in ver. 18, is co-extensive with "the Law and the Prophets" in the preceding verse, and includes

the whole Jewish canon.* Our Lord therefore states that everything written in the Holy Scriptures must, as a matter of Divine necessity, be fulfilled. He came for this end, that all might be fulfilled. Some things He fulfilled in His own Person; some things He is now fulfilling within the veil at the right hand of God; and some things remain to be fulfilled hereafter. The prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures extend down the stream of time, even to the second coming of Christ to judgment, when the heavens and the earth that now are shall pass away: when heaven and earth have thus passed away, then all will have been fulfilled; but till then not one jot or tittle of the law shall fail. The work of Christ was that which gave foundation and consistency to the whole counsel of God as revealed in the whole volume of His Word: what He has done is a pledge that all shall in due time be fulfilled.

The word "jot" is derived from the Greek letter *iota* (ι), which again came from the Hebrew letter *yod* (י), the smallest letters in those alphabets respectively. The word translated "tittle" (κεραία), means "a horn," or anything that projects like a horn; hence it is applied to the little ornamental projections of letters used in writing. In the Hebrew language, as in many others, the difference between one letter and another is in some instances so slight, that mistakes easily occur: cases might be quoted, where a mistake in a jot or a tittle might seriously affect the interpretation of a text, and change the character of our faith.† The expression, as

* Compare John x. 34, xii. 34, &c., where reference is made to the Psalms and the Prophets under the general term of "the Law," which indeed frequently means the whole Word of God.

† In the Council of Nicæa (A.D. 325), the chief point debated was, whether Christ was ὁμοούσιος (*Homöousios*), or ὁμοιούσιος (*Homoiousios*), that is, of the *same* substance, or of *like* substance, with the Father. The

used by our Lord, is proverbial, and the meaning simply is, that the Scriptures must be fulfilled in the most minute particulars. The proverb had its origin in the extreme jealousy with which the Jews guarded the copying of the Sacred Scriptures. The regulations prescribed for the copyists were excessively rigorous, almost superstitious. This was overruled by God for the preservation of the inspired text, and strengthens the evidence we have for believing that the canonical books have come down to us through so many centuries with no important variation, omission, or interpolation.

III. Having corrected the erroneous notion which prevailed respecting the purpose of His mission, our Lord proceeds, in ver. 19, to declare, that, so far from His relaxing or annulling any of God's commandments, not even the least of them could be broken with impunity. In this He condemned the doctrine of the scribes and Pharisees, who taught that there was a distinction among the commandments of the law, some being of greater obligation, and some of less. They had even manufactured a scale of degrees of obligation; the commandment which they called "the least commandment of the law" being that given in Deut. xxii. 6, 7, which forbade the taking of the hen-bird from the nest along with the young ones. Such a commandment as this the Jewish expositors affected to regard as of very small importance, and the transgression of it a very light and venial offence. Yet this very commandment contained a great moral principle, and inculcated mercy towards the brute creation. The lower animals are given to man for his lawful use, but he may not wantonly destroy them; and even when taking them for food, he

whole controversy, it will be observed, resolved itself into the insertion or exclusion of an *iota*.

is enjoined to take heed that the species be not destroyed, or recklessly diminished. This "least commandment" is a warrant for legislative interference to prevent the waste of animal life, which often occurs with respect to several species of fish and birds. It conveys a reproof also to those who are called "sportsmen," that is, persons who take animal life for sport, and for the purpose of exercising their skill in the use of fire-arms. Let these "sportsmen" find a bird to shoot at, it is not always a consideration with them whether it be a sire or a dam, or whether by their thoughtless cruelty a nest of helpless fledglings be left to perish from want, or whether the parent bird itself, wounded but not killed, be left to linger for days till death put an end to its misery.*

We may be assured that not one of God's commandments was given without a wise, just, and merciful reason, and that all are equally obligatory. Our Lord does not, indeed, assert that all God's commandments had regard to matters of equal moment, or that all transgressions of the Law were equally heinous; but He teaches that none of them can be broken with impunity. "Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven." The blind guides of the Jews were notoriously guilty, both of doing and teaching thus. They were punctilious in regard to fasting, paying tithes, and the like, while they omitted the weighter matters of the law. They strained their wine if they found a gnat in it, but swallowed a camel without difficulty (Matt. xxiii. 23, 24).† If such, then,

* It is not intended to assert that all sportsmen are equally reckless, especially in respect to the more valuable species of game. But alas! for such *sport*, even in its most favourable light!

† The camel and the gnat were alike unclean (Lev. xi. 4, 23).

were our Lord's verdict with reference to the ceremonial law, which was in force at the time He spoke, and continued in force until it had served its purpose, how much more strongly may we consider His language applicable to the moral law, which from its very nature is of perpetual obligation! Yet the corrupt teachers of the Jews did not hesitate to tamper even with the sacred precepts of the moral law; and in this they have unhappily been followed by the teachers of a corrupt Christianity. The law of God, for example, clearly imposed upon children the duty of providing for the wants of their parents when overtaken by age or infirmity; but the scribes taught, that if a man dedicated, or pretended to dedicate, to the treasury of the temple, that portion of his substance which should have been applied to the relief of his parents, calling it Korban, or a gift vowed to the Lord, he should be free from the obligation to do aught for his father or mother. Thus did they, as our Lord plainly told them, make the Word of God of none effect through their tradition, not in this case only, but in many others of a similar kind (Mark vii. 10–13).

The Church of Rome, which, under the Christian dispensation, exhibits the same characteristics that distinguished the Pharisees of old, has, in like manner, made void the law of God, and practically taught men to break His commandments, by accepting, under various disguises, pecuniary payments as compensations for sin; by imposing unwarrantable and unnecessary restrictions on Christian liberty, and then permitting these to be violated on payment of a sum of money;* and by extorting from sinners in the terrors of approaching dissolution, large donations to the Church, as a con-

* For example, it is contrary to the discipline of the Church of Rome to marry during Lent; but any man wishing to do so, has no difficulty, if he be willing to pay a handsome "Korban."

dition of receiving their pretended sacramental absolution and extreme unction. In their catechisms, also, they teach children that there is a distinction between "mortal" and "venial" sins: that is to say, that there are some sins, in which if a man die unabsolved, he goes immediately into everlasting condemnation; and that there are other sins, which only condemn him to Purgatory, from which he may be delivered by prayers and masses duly purchased and paid for. It may be questioned whether the unbridled licentiousness of heathen Rome in its grossest days was better calculated to darken the moral perceptions than this detestable doctrine of Rome, falsely called Christian.

What shall be said, also, to the Antinomian (if that form of heresy still exist), who teaches, that because Christ hath fulfilled the whole law, therefore it is not obligatory on believers to keep it; the practical meaning of which is, that a believer, instead of being bound to carefulness in maintaining good works, may break God's commandments with impunity. Our Lord, in opposition to this doctrine, declares that he who teaches thus shall be the least in the kingdom of heaven, which here means the Visible Church, or society of professing Christians. Such a man can have no real claim to be considered a Christian at all, but is one of those who, though they may profess to have done many things in Christ's name, shall find themselves dismissed with shame as workers of iniquity (vii. 23). True distinction and greatness in the Visible Church on earth, and the thrones of the kingdom of glory in heaven, are the portion of those who both do and teach others to do the commandments of God. "Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right* to the

* The *right* (ἐξουσία) here spoken of is not a legal right acquired by any man as the meritorious reward of his obedience; for it is not possible for

tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Rev. xxii. 14).

IV. Accordingly, our Lord further teaches, that no man shall enter the kingdom of heaven (meaning the kingdom of glory), who cannot stand before God with a better righteousness than that of the scribes and Pharisees.

The righteousness taught and practised by the scribes and Pharisees consisted in the rigid observance of the ceremonial law, and of the various traditions which had been added to it from time to time, and which the Rabbis pretend were communicated orally to Moses, during the forty days when he was alone with God in the Mount. By Moses, they say, these unwritten laws were communicated to the seventy elders of Israel, and by them to their successors, who gradually promulgated them to the people as occasion required. It is unnecessary to say that this oral or unwritten law was a pure fiction of the later scribes, designed to magnify their own authority in the eyes of the nation; and as many of these pretended traditions were directly opposed to the written Word, it was only by keeping the people in gross ignorance, and endeavouring to establish for themselves a reputation for extraordinary sanctity, that their pretensions could be maintained. Accordingly they assumed all the externals of profound piety, and appeared wholly absorbed in the exercises of devotion, concerning which it will be necessary to speak more fully when considering our Lord's teaching on the subjects of alms-doing, prayer, and fasting.

any creature of God, even if his obedience were perfect, to merit anything whatsoever from his Creator and Sovereign Lord. The right of the believer to the tree of life is derived solely from the gift of God's free grace in Christ Jesus.

The religion taught by the Church of Rome is of the same general character as that taught by the scribes and Pharisees. It rests chiefly on a mass of traditions, which, it is pretended, were orally communicated by Christ to the Apostles, and by the Apostles to their successors. By authority of these traditions, which have a remarkable family resemblance to those of Judaism, many burdensome ceremonies are imposed upon men, the observance of which is far more rigorously enforced than the observance of the written laws of God's Word. The tendency of all formal religion, whether it appear in a Popish or in a Protestant dress, is the same, namely, to substitute the letter for the spirit—to magnify that which is outward and of the flesh, and neglect that which is inward and of the heart (Rom. ii. 28, 29). Whether openly or covertly taught, the principle of formalism is everywhere the same, asserting that rites and ceremonies and human works of righteousness have a positive value and merit in the eyes of God, and are more or less efficacious for the pardon of sin. All religion, and all religious teaching, which directs the attention of mankind chiefly to observances of an external character, and does not give the most prominent place to the necessity of regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and faith in the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, may be considered as included in the same category with the righteousness taught and practised by the scribes and Pharisees.

Our blessed Lord tells us plainly that we must have a better righteousness than this, or we shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven. In thus speaking, He probably intended to prepare the minds of His disciples for the reception of the Gospel, and for submitting to "the righteousness of God without the law" therein to be revealed. He designed to lead them to the appre-

hension of that truth, that no possible righteousness of any child of Adam can *entitle* him to everlasting life; seeing that his best righteousness falls far short of perfection. The sinner must have a better righteousness than any mere human righteousness; and this righteousness was provided by the Messiah, who was the hope of Israel. The full doctrinal import of our Lord's words, therefore, is, "Except ye appear in the judgment clothed with the righteousness of God Himself, as exhibited in the life of the Messiah, which is the only righteousness that is perfect before God, and therefore immeasurably transcends that of the scribes and Pharisees, ye can have no part in Messiah's kingdom."

At the same time, while the doctrine of the righteousness of God in Christ is theologically implied in our Lord's words, this is not the most prominent idea contained in them. As before, when He spoke of hungering and thirsting after righteousness, it was evidently not the righteousness which becomes ours by justification to which He had respect, but rather to the personal righteousness which the law requires of every man; so here also, it seems obvious that they who heard our Lord's words would not understand them as referring, however remotely, to the matter of justification, but rather as affirming the necessity of cultivating their own individual holiness. They would understand our Lord to mean, that their own personal righteousness, though entirely unavailing as a procuring cause of salvation, must nevertheless far exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, or any outward, formal, or ceremonial righteousness whatever; and that, if it were not so, they could not be fit for the heavenly city, into which no man that loveth or maketh a lie can possibly be admitted.

This is a lesson for believers, and for all that profess

to be such, in every age. It speaks the language both of encouragement and warning.

On the one hand, it is a blessed and most consolatory truth, that the personal righteousness of the humblest believer in Jesus, with all its imperfections, far exceeds, in God's sight, the "voluntary humility" of the most austere devotee, Judaist or Christian, though his body be macerated by self-imposed penances, and though he may have denuded himself of all his earthly possessions by a vow of voluntary poverty. Of such "vain oblations" the Lord saith, "Who hath required this at your hand?" (Isa. i. 12.) But the righteousness of the believing child of God is of a higher stamp, and springs from a higher source. It is the work of God the Holy Spirit: it is produced by a radical change and renovation of heart, and is the fruit of faith in the righteousness of God: it claims no merit on its own account; yet is it a sacrifice acceptable to God by Jesus Christ; for it shows forth the glory of God, and of that great salvation which He hath provided for the sons of men. The most advanced believer has nothing whereof to glory: yea, the more advanced he is, the more forward is he to confess that his own best righteousness is no better than filthy rags; yet his righteousness exceeds that of scribes and Pharisees of every complexion and denomination, just as the genuine coin exceeds the counterfeit—just as the true, clear, tone of the silver trumpet of the sanctuary exceeds the sounding brass and tinkling cymbal which attract the applause of the multitude.

On the other hand, the professing Christian has need to be warned, that he may examine himself, and know what sort of righteousness he has. God's law demands of every man perfect obedience—an absolutely faultless obedience. Art thou able with ten thousand to meet Him that cometh against thee with twenty thousand?

Art thou able with thy imperfect righteousness to meet the Judge of all the earth? What hast thou to say, or to show, that sentence of condemnation should not be pronounced against thee? What sort of righteousness hast thou to present before the living and avenging God?

It is to be feared that not a few, bearing the name of Christ, are resting satisfied with a righteousness which does not even come up to that of the scribes and Pharisees; whose heart is not subdued before God, nor constrained to holiness by the love of Christ; who are afraid to do what the Saviour plainly commands all His followers to do, lest they should be reviled as Pharisees, or rejected as reprobate silver (Jer. vi. 30).

"Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. xviii. 3). Except ye come to Christ, naked and needy, ye cannot be clothed and enriched: through Him alone can ye bring forth that fruit of holiness, without which no man can see the Lord!

## XII.

# THE GOVERNMENT OF THE TEMPER;

## OR, THE LAW OF CHRIST CONCERNING MURDER.

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raka, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

"Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

"Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing."—MATT. v. 21–26.

THE sum of our Lord's teaching in the verses last considered was: That He had come into the world, not to destroy the law of God, but to fulfil everything written therein: That everything written in the books of the Old Testament should certainly be fulfilled in due time; and that the Word of God must continue to be the authoritative rule of faith and practice, so long as the world standeth: That to attempt to relax the obligations of the law of God, or to imagine, or teach, that His law was fulfilled by a mere external obedience, was utterly inconsistent with that purity of heart which was the essential characteristic of the heavenly kingdom; and that unless we appear before the judgment-seat of Messiah's

kingdom with a better righteousness—higher attainments in personal holiness—than the outward and formal righteousness practised and taught by the scribes and Pharisees, we shall in nowise be admitted to the mansions of glory prepared for the people of God.

It is not surprising to find that the people who listened to this teaching were filled with astonishment (vii. 28). Every word of the Divine COUNSELLOR was quick and powerful, and went home to the understanding and the conscience.

The general principles which He had laid down He now proceeds to illustrate by several examples, wherein He shows that the scribes, by their corrupt glosses, and pretence of ancient tradition, had done what in them lay to destroy or make void the law,—the very design which they had falsely imputed to Him. The scribes interpreted the law so as to make it applicable to outward actions only: Jesus, in opposition to their teaching, shows that the law extends to the inmost thoughts and affections of the heart. His object was, not to give a new construction to the law, or to teach that God gave the law to their fathers in a certain sense, and that He was now come to teach them a higher and better sense; but to declare to them the old and only true construction—to expound the real meaning of the law—the only meaning which it ever had, or was intended by the Lawgiver to have—but which had been kept from the people by their blind guides. The inspired prophets and teachers of old had given the true exposition of the moral law, as is evident from their writings;* but the inspired books themselves were little known to the body of the people, not only because copies were few and

* Compare Lev. xix. 18; Deut. vi. 5; Ps. x. 3, 4, 13; xiv. 1; xv. 1, 2; xxiv. 3, 4; l. 16-23; li. 6, 17, &c.; Isa. i. 11-15; lxvi. 3; Jer. v. 25-31; Ezek. viii. 12; xviii. 31, 32; Mal. ii.

costly, but because comparatively few were able to read; for the priests and scribes had an interest in keeping them in ignorance, and persuading them to accept their oral instruction as of equal authority with the written law, with which the people had no opportunity of becoming acquainted except by hearing it read in the synagogues on the Sabbath-days. The exposition of the law which our Lord was about to give was the same that had been given by the prophets, and which ought to have been taught to the people by the scribes. This true interpretation He now brings forth with authority, as one who was in His own person both a lawgiver and a pattern of obedience.

Our Lord selects, as His first example, the Sixth Commandment, of which the verses now before us contain His authoritative exposition—His exposition, that is, of the true original intent and meaning of the Lawgiver. We have, in these verses, the law of Christ, that is, the only true law of God, concerning MURDER.

"Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time,* Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill,

* The marginal rendering is "*to* them," &c. In support of this construction Dean Alford observes, that though both constructions occur (*by* and *to*), the former never occurs with the verb ἐῤῥήθη, which in the New Testament is never followed by any other substantive but that denoting the persons *to* whom the words are spoken. The critical question is, however, really of very slight importance, for it in no way affects the true question at issue, which is, *By whom* were the words spoken? The learned Dean cites authorities to show that the antithesis is between τοῖς ἀρχαίοις and ὑμῖν, and that the *speaker* was in both cases the same, namely, Christ Himself; and he adds: "It will be noticed that our Lord does not here speak against the *abuse of the law by tradition;* but that every instance here given is either from the law itself, or such traditional teaching as was in accordance with it," &c. It seems evident, on the contrary, that our Lord's intention was to contrast the *corrupt* interpretation of the scribes, which they pretended was derived by tradition from the elders, with the *true* interpretation which He Himself gave. The contrast is not between

shall be in danger of the judgment." The Sixth Commandment of the Decalogue is, "Thou shalt not kill." In some of the older versions of the Bible it is translated, "Thou shalt do no murder;" and it is to be regretted that this rendering was not retained in our present authorised version, as there are cases in which it is necessary and perfectly lawful to *kill*, or take away human life. The sin forbidden in the Sixth Commandment is the malicious or wrongful taking away of our own life, or the life of any other human being; and being a moral precept, it of course includes all the evil passions and affections which may prompt or tend to that sin.

The scribes interpreted the commandment as if it had been a mere law of a human commonwealth, which deals only with overt acts, and does not pretend to judge of men's thoughts. If there be no outward deed—no actual crime committed—there is nothing of which human laws can take hold. The scribes degraded the commandment of God to the level of ordinary human statutes. They concealed from the people the vital truth, that the law of God claims a rightful supremacy over our thoughts and affections, as well as over our actions. They taught, in this particular case, that even the overt act of murder was punishable only by the lowest civil tribunal; and they carefully kept from the eyes of the people the character of sin as an offence against the infinite holiness of God, which made the offender, however small the degree of his offence, liable to the vengeance of eternal fire.

To counteract this corrupt teaching, our Lord declares

the people that lived in old times and their descendants in a more enlightened age, nor yet between the Divine Word speaking in one age, and speaking differently in another, which is theologically absurd; but between spurious traditions and the truth of God. Whether this view is correct or not, the reader will be able to judge as he proceeds.

that the essence of the sin of murder lies in the feelings that prompt it: that causeless anger is of the nature of murder; and much more the use of contemptuous or reproachful language.

To be angry with a brother, that is, with any human being, without a cause, is of the nature of murder. The man that feels and cherishes causeless anger against any one, would, if he carried out his feelings, and were not restrained by fear of consequences, commit murder. The passion of anger, like all our other passions, was given to us for wise and benevolent purposes. It was designed to prompt us to act in self-defence; and the existence of such a passion makes men generally hesitate to offend one another; for no one voluntarily incurs the displeasure of another, unless there be a motive sufficiently powerful to overcome the natural unwillingness.

Our Lord's language in this place clearly implies that anger is not unlawful when there is a just cause for it; which is taught also by S. Paul (Eph. iv. 26), where he says, "Be ye angry, and sin not;" manifestly implying that it is possible to be angry without sin. Anger is lawful when it fulfils the purpose for which God implanted that passion in our breasts; that is, when it excites us to defend ourselves from aggression or injury, or to the defence of any persons or things that we are bound to protect—as our families, our country, our liberty, our faith. It is lawful to be angry when helpless innocence is oppressed; when the poor and needy are crushed and wronged; when the foot of a foreign invader is planted upon our native soil; much more when the law of our God is dishonoured, and His holy name blasphemed. David was lawfully angry when the uncircumcised Philistine defied the armies of the living God, and he said rightly, "Is there not a cause?"

The meek and lowly Jesus Himself was lawfully angry when He beheld the ungodly traffickers making His Father's house of prayer a den of thieves. Unhappily, however, this just and righteous anger is that which is least frequently witnessed. In the course of this world grievous injustice is done every day: the widow and the orphan are oppressed and plundered; the hire of the labourer is kept back,—and too often no voice is raised in their behalf. The law of God is openly trampled on, and even professing Christians see it, and are silent: the fire of holy indignation is not kindled in their breasts. "Am I my brother's keeper?"—"Why should I interfere in such matters?"—are the selfish, pusillanimous excuses by which men justify their moral supineness and sinful indifference to the claims of justice, mercy, and truth.

But the case is far otherwise when men feel the slightest touch of insult or injury in their own persons or property. As already remarked, anger is legitimate when it rouses to effort for protection or vindication of ourselves, or any cause in which we are legitimately interested; but if we suffer anger to go beyond this, then we are "angry without cause." Now, try by this test the exhibitions of anger which are most frequent in daily life. Look at that man, storming and stamping in a transport of rage, vengeance flashing from his eyes, curses issuing from his lips! and for what? Perhaps for some trifling disappointment in business—perhaps for some order unfulfilled or wrongly executed, through the unintentional mistake of a child or a servant—perhaps for something clearly the result of his own imprudence or obstinacy—perhaps for some loss or damage sustained in the providence of God! Look at that other man, indulging in the most violent invectives against his brother, who has, unwittingly perhaps, offended his

pride, without doing him any real injury! How seldom do men restrain their anger within just bounds, even when there is a cause! How frequently do they suffer the sun to go down on their wrath! How frequently are men incensed against their brother, when he has not offended them at all, but when the anger proceeds from feelings of envy, jealousy, or covetousness! And how often is this dangerous guest cherished in the breast, until it has engendered hatred, malice, revenge, and all the seeds of murder! So it was with David, who was angry with Uriah, not because Uriah had done him any wrong, for the king had no more faithful servant, but because he coveted the "poor man's ewe-lamb." The sole offence of Uriah was that he possessed that which the king coveted; therefore the king contrived the death of the honest soldier by the sword of the children of Ammon. According to the doctrine of the Jewish scribes, in which they are followed by many of the Romish casuists, David was not guilty of murder, or was guilty only in an inferior degree, because he did not slay Uriah with his own hand; yet for this foul murder, and the foregone adultery that prompted it, God's prophet was sent to denounce the sentence against him, that the sword should never depart from his house; and David himself, when he had repented of his sin, prayed in terms which admit of no doubt as to the estimate he had formed of the nature of the offence: "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness" (Ps. li. 14). Alas! alas! every man that has ever envied another, or coveted his possessions, or been jealous because he has been preferred before himself; every man that has ever wished evil to another, or rejoiced, even in thought, when calamity has befallen him, has need, with deep contrition of heart, to pray the same prayer; for "we are verily guilty concerning our brother."

Our Lord teaches, further, that reproachful language addressed to another is an offence of the same nature as murder; the tongue, in such case, being an indicator of what the hand would do, if the feelings of the heart were carried to their natural consequences. The open railer is at heart a highway murderer: the secret whisperer and calumniator is at heart a midnight assassin. In illustration of this, our Lord specifies two examples of opprobrious speech, which were of frequent use among the Jews of that day. "Raka" is simply an expression of contempt, implying, according to some, a suspicion of effeminacy. Our English word "coxcomb" very nearly corresponds to it. "Thou fool," as the Jews understood it, was a much harsher reproach than the words convey to an English ear. The Greek term here rendered "fool," and the Hebrew equivalent,* are not applied in Scripture to half-witted, imbecile persons, such as those to whom the English term "fool" is applied in modern conversation. Persons of weak or defective intellect, as well as insane persons, have always, in the East, been regarded as sacred, and as being under the special protection of God. Vain, empty, conceited persons, who are often called "fools" in the present day, are not intended by the term here employed. In the Scriptures, as "wisdom" is equivalent to true religion, and "wise men" to true believers; so "folly" is equivalent to wickedness, and "fools" to sinners, or wicked men, miscreants, perverse reprobates, who persist in evil. Thus: "The FOOL hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Ps. xiv. 1). "FOOLS make a mock at sin" (Prov. xiv. 9); "Professing themselves wise, they BECAME FOOLS"† (Rom. i. 22). But when the inspired writers speak of men as simply *short-sighted*, or wanting in judgment and prudence, different words are used,

* Μωρός, = נָבָל, *a fool.* † ἐμωράνθησαν.

though our translators, by the indiscriminate use of the English "fools," and "foolish," have made the sense of some passages obscure. When our Lord said to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, "O fools,* and slow of heart" (Luke xxiv. 25); when S. Paul wrote to the Galatians, "O foolish† Galatians, who hath bewitched you?" (Gal. iii. 1;) when God rebuked the covetous worldling, saying, "Thou fool"‡ (Luke xii. 20); and, to mention no more, when S. Paul exhorted the Ephesians to "walk circumspectly, not as fools,§ but as wise" (Eph. vi. 15), terms were employed which, though conveying very grave rebuke, imply necessarily nothing more than thoughtlessness, recklessness, and disregard of hereafter, and come far short of the depravity implied in the term here used by our Lord, which is the same that He used to describe the foolish ‖ virgins in Matt. xxv. 1–13, a point of which commentators have lost sight, but which is not unimportant in the interpretation of that remarkable parable.

Our Lord teaches, then, that to use opprobrious language, with the intention of insulting or defaming another, is a breach of the moral law, and involves the guilt of murder. At the same time, He does not say that there is no occasion which can justify the use of strong language, or even of inculpatory expressions, in denouncing the unbelief and wickedness of men. It is not anger in itself that He condemns, but anger without cause; so, it is not the calling of sins by their right names, even though it should be necessary to use language apparently harsh and opprobrious, that is declared to be unlawful, but the using of such language wantonly and for the sake of provocation, by those who have no authority to administer reproof or rebuke. There are occasions when the strongest language is

* ἀνοήτοι. † ἀνοήτοι. ‡ ἄφρων. § ἄσοφοι. ‖ μωραί.

not too strong. Our Lord Himself applied the very term here employed, and even still harsher terms, to the scribes and Pharisees: "Ye fools and blind!"* "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers!" (Matt. xxiii. 17, 33); "Ye are of your father the devil" (John viii. 44). S. Paul used similar language in denouncing Elymas the sorcerer, whom he addressed as a "child of the devil" (Acts xiii. 10); and again in rebuking Ananias, though not knowing him to be the high priest: "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall" (Acts xxiii. 3); in like manner S. James writes:—"Wilt thou know, O vain† man" (which expression is equivalent to Raka), "that faith without works is dead?" It is legitimate to infer, from the use of such language by Christ and the prophets and apostles, that there are seasons when it is not simply allowable, but necessary, to use decided terms in characterising human sins. The interests of truth and righteousness demand that men shall not be flattered in their vices, or be permitted to suppose that gross perversions of the truth are other than "damnable heresies"‡ (2 Pet. ii. 1). He that thus utters the language of condemnation, however, has need to exercise great watchfulness over his own spirit. If, in holy jealousy for the Lord of hosts, and indignation at the contempt put upon His laws by wicked men, a Christian is constrained to "cry aloud, and spare not," yet his language will be rather the effusion of sorrow than of anger, even as the blessed Jesus wept over the guilty city, which He denounced as stained with the blood of His prophets (Luke xiii. 34; xix. 41). It were to be wished that controversialists in the Church had more carefully borne this example in mind. Their pages are, unhappily, blotted with railing accusations, for which it is a very inadequate apology to say that such was the tem-

* Μωροὶ καὶ τυφλοί. † ὦ ἄνθρωπε κενέ. ‡ αἱρέσεις ἀπωλείας.

per of the times in which they lived. The true followers of Christ ought to know better what manner of spirit they are of (Luke ix. 55). The times in which the Apostles themselves lived were more trying than any that have been since their days; yet even those inspired teachers, who had a right to rebuke with all authority, were very sparing in the use of condemnatory expressions, and exhort us rather to restore offenders in a spirit of meekness, considering ourselves, lest we also should be tempted (Gal. vi. 1).

The three degrees of punishment mentioned by our Lord in ver. 22, though His allusions would be perfectly intelligible to Jewish hearers, have occasioned no little perplexity to Christian commentators. It is unnecessary to reproduce in these pages the curious questionings of former days, more especially as the general meaning is not controverted. It is admitted that our Lord refers to the Jewish tribunals, and to the different degrees of punishment inflicted by those tribunals. The lowest tribunal was called "The Judgment," and consisted of twenty-three elders or magistrates, who had the power of sentencing offenders to death by strangling, or by beheading. Stoning to death was considered a higher degree of punishment, and could only be inflicted by sentence of the Sanhedrim, or chief council of the nation. The council had also power to sentence the bodies of offenders who had been stoned to be cast out and burned in the Valley of Hinnom. This valley lay outside the city of Jerusalem, on the southern side, and was the scene of the horrid sacrifices of children to the heathen god Moloch, for which the children of Israel were infamous in the days of their idolatrous kings. The valley was afterwards pronounced accursed, and was made a place of deposit for all the

offal of the city, to consume which fires were continually kept burning. It was for this reason called "The Gehenna of Fire," meaning "The Fiery Valley of Hinnom."* Such being the character of this valley, it is not difficult to understand how its name came to be used as a designation for HELL, the place or state of everlasting torment reserved for the wicked, in contradistinction to HADES, *the invisible world*, or state of departed souls, which comprehended both PARADISE, or Abraham's bosom, the abode of the departed saints, and the PLACE OF TORMENT, in which the wicked are confined until the Day of Judgment (Luke xvi. 23, 28). Our translators have caused some confusion by rendering both Hades and Gehenna by the same word "Hell," which to English ears always conveys the idea of *the place of everlasting torment;* but this is never intended, either by the Greek HADES, or the corresponding Hebrew word SHEOL.† Hence the necessity of attending to the distinction whenever the word "hell" occurs in our English Bibles. In the passage under consideration our Lord says, "Whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of the GEHENNA OF FIRE," that is, of everlasting condemnation (compare Mark ix. 43–48).

* In the Old Testament the valley is called "The Valley of the Son of Hinnom," and also "Tophet." On account of the cruel rites anciently practised there, as well as on account of its later pollution, the Jews in our Lord's day held this valley in extreme detestation. In the Persian and Arabic languages the name, *Jehennom*, is retained to this day as the name of the place of future torment.

† The errors and perplexities which have arisen from this confounding of Hades with Gehenna by the common rendering "Hell," are very serious. An important article of Christian faith, *the descent of Christ into Hades*, is converted into a hideous impossibility, which pious Christians refuse to receive. On the τόπος τῆς βασάνου, as a part of Hades, Dean Alford says:— "Not eternal condemnation; for the judgment has not yet taken place: men can only be judged *in the body* for the deeds *done in the body;* but, the *certainty* and *anticipation* of it."

The attempted inference of the Romish casuists, however, namely, that *aggravated reproaches* alone are to be deemed worthy of eternal condemnation, cannot be sustained. Our Lord specifies, no doubt, three degrees of punishment; but the material point, of which Romish divines are entirely oblivious, is, that the lowest of these degrees included *death.* The gradation is not from inferior punishments to death; but from death in a milder form to death in a more severe form, and culminating in death with privation of the rites of sepulture, and the casting out of the body into the Valley of Hinnom, to be devoured by worms, or burnt with fire.* Our Lord's words, therefore, give no countenance to the Romish figment, that though very gross reproaches may deserve eternal punishment, anger or moderate reproaches may be expiated by an inferior degree of punishment,—that is to say, by penances in this life, or the fire of purgatory in the next. Our Lord teaches, on the contrary, that the smallest sin deserves and involves the eternal death of the soul. And as we are elsewhere clearly taught that there are degrees of glory in the kingdom of heaven (1 Cor. xv. 41; Matt. xviii. 4, xix. 28, 29; Luke xix. 17, 19); so, it is not unreasonable to infer, and our Lord's words add strength to the inference, that there are degrees of shame and torment in the eternal fire; though the nature of the gradation, in the one case equally with the other, is hidden from our mortal perceptions. But as, in the heavenly state, the degrees of glory will correspond to the degrees of grace vouchsafed to different believers; so, in the

* This is what makes our Lord's words so terrible: "Where their *worm dieth not*, and the *fire is not quenched*." In the Valley of Hinnom the worms would die, and the fires would be quenched; but not so in the Gehenna of which He spake.—(*Vide supra*, pp. 131, *sqq.*)

opposite state, the degrees of punishment will correspond to the degrees of guilt, or obstinate resistance of the Holy Ghost, which shall be found in different classes of sinners (Luke xii. 47, 48).

The remaining verses of the passage now before us illustrate and confirm the exposition of the law which our Lord has given. If it be indeed true that even the risings of bitterness and wrath in our breasts, and the mere utterance of reproachful terms against another, involve the punishment of spiritual and eternal death, the inference is manifest, that whenever we have offended any one, in thought, word, or deed, we ought without delay to seek reconciliation. Our Lord in effect bids us remember, that to continue in a state of variance, especially when the offence has originated with ourselves, and to make no effort towards a reconciliation, is virtually to be guilty of murder; for it implies the cherishing of sentiments of anger and hatred, the fountains from which murder flows. How can a man, with such sentiments in his heart, consistently compass the altar of God, or take his place at the table of Him whose nature and whose name is Love?* How can such a man presume to hope that God will accept the lame and blemished offerings that he brings? (Mal. i. 8, 13.) Let not such waverers and double-minded professors think that they shall receive anything of the Lord (Jam. i. 7). It is to such insincere and corrupt worshippers that God saith by His prophet, "When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: *your hands are full of blood*" (Isa. i. 15). And it is of such

* "To me, to all, Thy bowels move:
Thy nature and Thy name is Love."—*Charles Wesley.*

that the beloved disciple writes: "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer; and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him."

To cultivate brotherly love, and, as much as lieth in us, to be in peace and charity with all mankind, are always essential Christian duties; but if there be a time when these duties are more forcibly urged upon our consciences than another, it is when we meditate an approach to God in the ordinances of His sanctuary. The only offering from sinful man which can be acceptable in God's sight is the sacrifice of a broken and contrite spirit (Ps. li. 17); but no man can really present such an offering who continues wilfully unreconciled to his brother. There is blood upon his hands, and his sacrifice is only an abomination, until his hands are washed in innocency (Ps. xxvi. 6). Better to leave the prayer unsaid, the sermon unheard, the bread and the wine untasted, and go, then and there, and seek reconciliation. Then, but not till then, can he hope to ascend the hill of God with clean hands and a pure heart. Then, and not till then, will God accept an offering at his hands. Then, and not till then, let him come and offer his gift.

The same lesson our Lord also teaches to him who is at law with another. The case supposed is that of a debtor justly indebted to a creditor. And the counsel given is in accordance with both justice and prudence. It is not merely a moral duty, but, in a worldly point of view, it is also the best policy, to pay, or arrange for the payment of, our debts, while we have the opportunity—to settle with our adversary-at-law promptly, while the cause is yet open, and judgment has not been pronounced; for if the creditor proceed to judgment, the judge will have no alternative but to condemn the debtor to pay, not only the original debt, but the costs

of suit in addition. In days when imprisonment for debt was practised, and the creditor was inexorable in demanding the "penalty and forfeit of the bond," the judge, as a matter of course, gave up the debtor to the officer of the court, by whom he was dragged to prison, release being impossible until the uttermost farthing was paid.

Such is the obvious literal interpretation of vers. 25, 26; but it has been generally thought, and justly, that our Lord had reference to far higher transactions than those between the debtors and creditors of this world, and designed to suggest thoughts of a tribunal far higher than any earthly judgment-seat. On this point nothing can be added to the judicious commentary of Mr Scott:—"Our injurious conduct towards men (as well as our other sins) render us liable to the wrath of God, who is our adversary-at-law. We are on the way to His judgment-seat; our time may be short: a way of reconciliation is revealed; and we should avail ourselves of it immediately. If this be neglected, the cause will come to a trial, the sinner will be condemned by the Judge, delivered to the executioners of vengeance, and cast into the prison of hell: and seeing that he can never make satisfaction to offended justice, or pay all his debt (especially as new crimes will continually enhance the score), so he must not expect to be enlarged any more for ever."

From the expression, "Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing," * —"the very last mite," according to Luke—Romish writers have attempted to draw support for one of the

* **Κοδράντης** (Lat. *quadrans*) a *Roman* brass coin = the fourth part of an *as* = three-fourths of a farthing. The λεπτόν mentioned by Luke (xii. 59) was the smallest *Jewish* coin = half a κοδράντης = three-eighths of a farthing.

most pernicious fables of their Church. The "prison" here spoken of they allege to mean the "fire of purgatory;" and they infer that sinners confined in that prison shall not be delivered until they have suffered the full amount of punishment due to them on account of their sins: but when this punishment has been endured, though it may be after the lapse of many thousands of years, the debtor shall be emancipated, and admitted into the realms of glory. It is sufficient to reply, that no amount of punishment inflicted on the sinner can take away his sin. Towards such a debt the sinner has nothing to pay. If his sins are not freely cleansed by the blood of Christ, he cannot be cleansed at all. So far from teaching that satisfaction for sin is possible in a future state, our Lord's words teach, in the most forcible manner, that such satisfaction is impossible, and that eternal punishment is the necessary legal consequence of the smallest sin (compare xviii. 34).

In conclusion: The law concerning murder, thus expounded by our Divine COUNSELLOR, in accordance with the original intention of the Lawgiver, and in opposition to the corrupt glosses and traditions of men, is well calculated to make every man pause and examine himself. Where is the man who, trying himself by this law, can say that his hands are pure from blood? Is there one that has not oftentimes in his heart envied, hated, cursed his brother?

Let me lie low in the dust before the Searcher of hearts! If I am to be judged out of those things which are written in the books of doom (Rev. xx. 12), and have nothing to plead but my own insufficient payments, the miserable dross of my own righteousness, there can be nothing before me but the eternal prison-house, "where all life dies, death lives," and where

countless ages shall roll away, and find the uttermost farthing as far from being paid as it is now.

But, blessed be God! the debt is already paid by One who was able to pay it. My debt, immense though it be, and utterly insolvent as I am, is paid, and I am set free for ever, the moment that by faith I lay my hand on the head of that Sacred Victim, who became my surety (Heb. vii. 22; 1 John i. 7).

O thou, my soul, believest thou this? All things are possible to him that believeth (Mark ix. 23). If thou art still in debt, agree with thine Almighty Adversary quickly, while the way is open. But if, through grace, I have the blessed assurance that the handwriting of ordinances that was against me is blotted out, and nailed to the cross of my Lord and my God, let me give myself wholly to Him. To Thee, O blessed Jesus, I commit myself, body, soul, and spirit! And do Thou enable me to have pity upon my fellow-servants, even as Thou hast had pity upon me! (xviii. 33.)

## XIII.

# THE CHASTENING OF THE DESIRES;

## OR, THE LAW OF CHRIST CONCERNING ADULTERY AND DIVORCE.

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

"And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

"It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: but I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery."—MATT. v. 27-32.

IN these verses we have the law of Christ, which is the only true law of God, concerning adultery and divorce.

These are subjects which, in these days, are seldom mentioned in the pulpit, and are but slightly, if at all, noticed in works of a professedly ethical and didactic character. They are, undoubtedly, subjects of very great delicacy, and not easily handled: it cannot therefore be desirable that such topics should be frequently or unnecessarily obtruded upon Christian congregations, or upon general readers. But, on the other hand, it is impossible to concur with those who think

that these topics ought to be wholly pretermitted, either in the public ministry of the Church, or in formal expositions of Scripture issued from the press. A minister of the Gospel or a Christian moral writer is not at liberty to keep silence on these matters; and this will appear evident to those who will dispassionately ponder the following considerations.

First, The Seventh Commandment is an integral part of the law of God, as much as the Sixth or the Eighth. An expounder of the Moral law, therefore, whether he speak from the pulpit, or through the press, has no right to pass over the Seventh Commandment, as if it had no place in the Decalogue. For thus saith the Lord: "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you" (Deut. iv. 2). If it be urged, that the subject of the particular commandment in question is one on which it is not convenient, or for edification, to speak either to the public ear or to the public eye—the answer is, that God thought otherwise: His commandments are addressed both to the ears and to the eyes of all men, women, and children that dwell upon the face of all the earth. Our blessed Lord Himself evidently selected this commandment as requiring special animadversion; and it is manifest that both the prophets of the Old Testament and the Apostles of the New, who spake and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, kept not silence on this subject, but cried aloud, and spared not. What are the ordinary pastors of the Church, then, that, either in speech or writing, they should dare to suppress or pass by any part of the testimony of the Lord, or refrain their lips from preaching righteousness, as God gives them opportunity, in this as well as in other matters?

Secondly, The sins forbidden in the Seventh Commandment are by no means obsolete. Such has been the progress of education and refinement, indeed, that we no longer hear or see, among the middle and higher classes of society, the same amount of profanity or profligacy that was only too familiar to the eyes and ears of our grandfathers. There is now, no doubt, more outward decency. Vice has lost, apparently, much of the grossness which the literature of ages not very far removed shows to have been shamefully prevalent. But that it has lost none of its evil is also apparent, for in fact these very sins, the very mention of which, it is said, ought to be excluded from the utterances of public teachers of morals;—these very sins, in this nineteenth century of the Christian era, in Christian Britain, and not less in British Colonies, form one of the greatest difficulties which the Christian philanthropist and the student of social science have to encounter;—these very sins are spoken of, by way of eminence, as "*The* Social Evil." And it is most certain, that no sins tend to corrupt and debase a community so directly and powerfully as these. Satan began his unholy war against the human race by corrupting the mind of her who was to be the mother of all living; and perhaps the most powerful engine by which he has in subsequent ages carried on the same war has been the corrupting of the daughters of men, and using their blandishments in corrupting the sons. It was so in the world before the flood: it was so with Israel in the wilderness: it is so with mankind at large in the present day; and he who imagines that professing Christians have no need of instruction in this particular department of morals, knows very little of human nature, or of the depths of Satan, or of the world in which he lives.

Thirdly, Much of the evil that exists in the world, and in quarters where it is little suspected, is, there can be little doubt, the consequence of the reticence which it has become fashionable to observe with respect to these subjects. Young men and young women are trained up in utter ignorance of many of their most important duties, and thus fall blindfold into the snares spread for their lives. Parents fear to speak of these things to their children:* teachers dare not speak of them to their pupils: ministers of the Gospel are afraid to allude to them in their discourses. This reticence is a very serious mistake, frequently arising from ignorance, but more frequently from spurious fastidiousness and moral cowardice. Let it be remembered that "every word of God is pure" (Prov. xxx. 5); and that though impurity does unhappily exist in the world, it is, on that very account, the more necessary for "the pure in heart" to go into this impure world, and, in the exercise of their function as "the salt of the earth," to correct the impurity by endeavouring to bring the children of men under the purifying influence of the holy law of God. "To the pure all things are pure" (Tit. i. 15); and that man cannot but be regarded as in a most unhealthy state of mind who cannot bear to hear those sins mentioned, which, more perhaps than all others, resist the

* "Of course there is the risk of tainting an ingenuous mind by broaching such a subject, and unfolding before it this distressing page in the book of knowledge of good and evil. But when it is needful, a father should, in my opinion, accept the grave responsibility; for, knowing what I know, and seeing what I see, I would not face the greater unknown ill of dismissing my child to the probability of contamination, without an attempt to save him." "So strongly do I feel the propriety of such a course of proceeding . . . . that I would urge parents, if they feel themselves unequal to the responsibility, to transfer the duty to their medical adviser."—*Acton on the Functions, &c., Considered in their Physiological, Social, and Moral Relations.* 1865. pp. 12, 13. Mr Acton's invaluable work should be in the hands of every one who has to do with the training of youth.

free course of God's Word, and maintain the kingdom of Satan. It would be impossible to expound in order almost any book of Holy Scripture without finding occasion to speak of these sins; and while no man will venture to tread upon such ground without reluctance, the writings of some of our best divines of former days amply demonstrate the possibility of treating such difficult subjects without unnecessarily wounding the most delicate sensibilities.* In a word, it is manifestly inconsistent with the duty of an expositor of God's Word to shun the declaration of any part of God's counsel, or to keep silence when the Lord hath spoken. Those passages of the Bible which relate to sins of uncleanness are, not less than other scriptures, "given by inspiration of God, and are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. iii. 16, 17).

Our blessed Lord, in this place, as generally throughout this discourse, designed to teach that the law of God extends, not only to outward acts, but also to the thoughts, desires, and affections of the heart, asserting entire dominion over the whole man. The scribes and Pharisees falsely taught that the law had respect only to overt acts; and as, according to their doctrine, nothing short of actual murder amounted to a breach of the Sixth Commandment, so also, with respect to the Seventh Commandment, they taught that only the actual crime of adultery was forbidden. The Pharisee in the temple

* See the works of Ussher, Bishop Hall, Barrow, Leighton, Bishop Wilson, Bishop Ken, Jeremy Taylor, Doddridge, Wesley, &c. &c. See also the Homilies of the Church of England. Presbyterian divines, with few exceptions, have avoided these subjects. Whether they have acted faithfully in so doing is a question they must answer.

thanked God that he was not an adulterer, as other men were, supposing himself innocent because he was not guilty of the act.

It is this narrowness of view with respect to the Divine law—this fatal laxity of moral sentiment, that our blessed Lord so emphatically denounces. He does not speak—and in this exposition it will not be necessary to speak—of those more gross and scandalous violations of purity which all moralists, heathen as well as Christian, agree in condemning. "Christ the COUNSELLOR" strikes at the root of the whole evil by exhorting men to chasten their desires. It is in the heart of man that all evil desires are formed; and it is by the subjugation of our evil desires that we shall most successfully prevent evil actions. Such is the important lesson taught in the passage now before us. Let us first consider, The necessity of restraining our desires; and, secondly, The means by which such restraint may be accomplished.

I. Our Lord, then, inculcates THE NECESSITY OF RESTRAINING OUR DESIRES.

It has been profanely argued by Socialists and other antichristian writers, that, since God has implanted certain appetites in man's moral and physical constitution, it is unreasonable to make the indulgence of these appetites sinful. And this idea is very extensively entertained by many who would not like to be thought infidels, but who do practically deny God by impugning the justice of His laws. Indeed, there are probably few, even of those who would not willingly harbour a thought dishonouring to God, across whose minds the question has not flitted, "Why have passions or desires been given to us, if we are forbidden to gratify them?" The young especially, in whom all the appetites are strong and fierce, are apt to be unsettled by such insidious

whisperings; and surely both reason and religion teach that the proper way to deal with those who may be thus unsettled is to speak to them, not in the language of reproach and condemnation, but in that of love and tenderness. Instead of frowning down such questions, surely it is better to answer them quietly and candidly. Many a fine young man has been actually scolded into a course of profligacy by injudicious parents or teachers, who might, with God's help, have been saved by a little common sense and a little Christian sympathy. With a view of helping those who may desire to help others, the following remarks are submitted.

Let it be at once, and at the outset, clearly understood that no appetite which has been implanted in our nature by the God that made us is in itself sinful. It is both natural and lawful for man to desire food and raiment; to desire property; to desire to surround himself with domestic relationships, and to have children who shall bear his name and inherit his estate. In the resurrection, that is, in the earth regenerated under the sceptre of Christ, man shall neither marry nor give in marriage (Matt. xxii. 30); hunger and thirst shall be no more (Rev. vii. 16); and the desire for property shall be extinguished by the actual possession of all things (Rom. viii. 17, Rev. xxi. 7); but while we dwell in a tabernacle of flesh, we have appetites, given us for wise and holy purposes, and which in themselves are not sinful.

The real question, then, is not, Are human appetites sinful? To affirm this would be to reproach our Maker. But the question is, Ought these appetites to be indulged without restraint?

The answer of the Socialist and Communist to this question is, "Property is Robbery!" "Marriage is a crime!" According to Proudhon and Robert Owen, no man ought to claim an exclusive right to anything, but

the perfection of human society would consist in having all things in common. The theory is by no means new: there is not one of the old mythologies of paganism that has not some trace of such a state. The "Golden Age" of the Greek and Roman fabulists was precisely the Socialistic and Communistic ideal; and the Cumæan Sibyl foretold the return of that Saturnian age, when the Virgin Astræa shall again hold the scales of justice, and a heaven-descended race shall dwell in the midst of abundance and peace.* The well-informed Christian does not require to be reminded that the one small grain of truth underlying the myths and oracles of heathen antiquity was borrowed from the Holy Scriptures, and that these same Scriptures assure us that a far brighter future shall yet be revealed than the most ardent imagination of man has dared to conceive. When human nature shall have been brought into a perfect state by the presence and power of the Perfect One, when all selfishness and all sensualism shall have been eliminated from the world, then we may look for the prevalence of Communism in the highest and purest sense; but in the world as it now is, Communism is simply an absurdity, contradicted by the common judgment of mankind. There could be no society of human beings, *constituted as we are*, without both property and marriage. So long as men have passions, laws will be necessary to restrain them. If a community of goods were proclaimed to-morrow, and the laws of marriage suddenly dissolved, rapine and bloodshed, with every horrible excess and outrage, would be the certain result; and when this reign of licence and terror had reduced the country to desolation, we should be compelled to return to a state of law and restraint to save ourselves from utter destruction. This is no mere speculative opinion: the experi-

* See the Fourth Eclogue of Virgil.

ment has been tried in France; and the result is matter of history.

Laws for restraining the indulgence of our natural appetites are therefore necessary; and it is well for us that the God who is the Author of our being, who knoweth our frame and remembereth that we are dust, has Himself prescribed the laws by which our passions are to be circumscribed. Our appetite for food, for example, is limited by the law of labour. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." Every man is commanded to labour; and he that eats and drinks to such excess that he is unfitted for bodily or mental exertion, sins against the law of his life, and violates the conditions necessary even for temporal happiness; nay, more, he debases and defiles the image of God, and thus insults the majesty of Heaven. So the appetite for property is limited by the law of honesty: "Thou shalt not steal." And, in like manner, the appetite for society is limited by the law of marriage, which is, indeed, the foundation of society, and of all human government. And, as if specially to prevent the possibility of evasion, or of perverse disputing as to the difference between secret desires and overt acts, the law of God saith, "Thou shalt not covet," either house, or wife, or anything that is another's. The scribes who read this law in the synagogues every Sabbath-day, pronounced their own condemnation.

Let it be clearly understood, further, that these restraints, imposed by the Divine Lawgiver, are necessary, and are designed for the advantage and happiness of man himself. All righteous laws contemplate the welfare of those that are bound by them, and are not the arbitrary expressions of a tyrant's will. The laws of God are both righteous and reasonable. It is not good, either for the body or the soul, that the appetencies of

the flesh should be indulged without restraint. Such unbridled licentiousness invariably causes premature decay, both of the bodily and mental faculties. Would that our youth could learn wisdom from the experience of others! Would that a young man, before he makes his first plunge into the gulf of temptation, could be made to witness, in our gaols, hospitals, and asylums, the terrible consequences of indulging the carnal appetites in defiance of the law of God! Would that he could be made to see, as in a vision, the fearful sights which charity veils from the public gaze: the raving maniac—the shivering, mumbling paralytic—the helpless, gibbering idiot—made such, not by the immediate dispensation of Providence, but, in the great majority of cases, by their own excesses, and abuses of the gifts of God, or perhaps by sad inheritance from profligate parents or ancestors! Could he but see these things, he would ask no further proof that restraint is necessary, and that God's law is both wise and merciful.

More particularly, with reference to the law of marriage, the wisdom of the Divine Lawgiver will appear especially conspicuous, if we look to those countries where restraint is practically almost unknown. Polygamy does not increase the population or the wealth of those countries, but the contrary: the people are for the most part diminutive and enervated. The dominant race in the world at this moment is unquestionably the Anglo-Saxon—that race which, more than all others, has observed the law of God with respect to marriage—that race which, under the influence of Protestant Christianity, has, on the one hand, discouraged celibacy and conventualism as religious states of life, and, on the other, has elevated the female character, and made woman no longer the toy or the slave, but what God intended her to be, the companion and friend of man.

Since, therefore, the true happiness of mankind depends on the observance of those restraints which the law of God has imposed, it follows that the encouragement of desires which prompt to the transgression of those restraints is injurious and sinful. The desire, if indulged within those limits which God hath fixed, is not sinful. But to look in order to excite impure thoughts, or to cherish with complacency such thoughts, when, without our contrivance, they occur to our minds, is sin. These unhallowed gazings and polluting imaginations are the seeds of overt sin; nay, when the unlawful desire is formed in the heart, the sin is committed, so far as the will of the man is concerned. Opportunity alone is then wanting to complete the crime. Thus we find that all wise and holy men, who desired to maintain dominion over their own will, prayed and strove against the rising of sinful desires—"the motions of sins," as S. Paul calls them (Rom. vii. 5)—because they knew that it was while the evil deed was in the bud that it could be most easily repressed. Thus Job made a covenant with his eyes, that he would not even look upon that which might cause him to sin (Job xxxi. 1). Thus David prayed, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity" (Ps. cxix. 37). God has given us a natural covering for our eyes; and reason and conscience, as well as the Divine law, enjoin us to use this prudent and modest veil, so that we may not even see what is likely to tempt us to sin.

It is, no doubt, objected against our Lord's severe interpretation of this law, as it is against every stringent law, whether of God or man, that it imposes restrictions impossible to flesh and blood. On this subject something shall be said presently: in the meantime, let it be admitted, as a general truth, that absolutely sinless perfection is not attained while we are in a mortal and cor-

ruptible body. It is impossible, as all Christians admit, for fallen man, in his own strength only, to resist the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. A corrupt heart throbs in the breast of every one of us: there is a law in our members warring against the law of our minds, and seeking to hold us in its hateful captivity. There is no natural power in the best of men to prevent them from falling into the lowest depths of sin. Reason and conscience may do much as wholesome checks to sinful appetites; but where their remonstrances are not strengthened by religious principle—where the fear of God is not before the eyes, and the love of Christ does not constrain the affections—those silent monitors are too often wholly powerless against the flood-tide of passion, which sweeps all before it with irresistible force, drowning the still small voice in the tumultuous rush of waters; until, when the delirium is over, the waves recede, and the unhappy victim of his stolen fire is left, like the fabled Prometheus of old, writhing upon a seared and blasted rock, bound by the fetters of despair, and the demon-vulture of remorse gnawing at his vitals for ever.

II. The necessity of chastening our desires being established, it remains to consider the means by which that chastening may be accomplished. Our Lord enjoins a sharp and severe discipline. "If thy right eye offend thee"—that is, cause thee to offend, or lead thee into sin—"pluck it out, and cast it from thee." "If thy right hand cause thee to offend, cut it off." It has never been supposed that this precept was to be understood literally. The literal sacrifice of an eye or hand would not entirely destroy sinful desires, though it might make it impossible to gratify them. The obvious intention of the precept is, that we must crucify our

sinful affections by the exercise of severe self-denial. To close the eye, so that it shall not gaze upon a forbidden object; to hold back the hand, that it shall not touch what it is not lawful to possess or enjoy; to refrain the foot, that it shall not carry us into scenes where our purity or integrity will be endangered; such self-denial is more really virtuous, and requires a higher effort of moral courage, than any physical suffering undergone for the same end. When we refuse to yield our members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin (Rom. vi. 13), we cut them off or pluck them out far more effectually than by the literal application of the knife. The man who subjects himself to this rigorous discipline "for the kingdom of heaven's sake" (Matt. xix. 12), attains to moral excellence of a far higher grade than that of the miserable ascetic, who flies from the world and buries himself alive in a monastic cell or a cave in the desert. No retirement, no penances, no mere physical restraints can place us wholly beyond the influence of corrupt desires: no maiming of the body can exclude sin from the soul. A sinful imagination will create for itself impure pictures, and maintain its unholy revel in the breast, though there be no object present to inflame the senses, and though the commission of the sinful act be impossible. He is the real anchorite who possesses "that power of the mind over outer circumstances which we call *a strong will*. Without this resolute grasp of the intellect and moral nature to direct, control, and thoroughly master all the animal instincts, a man's life is but an aimless, rudderless drifting, at the mercy of every gust of passion, or breeze of inclination, towards tolerably certain shipwreck." To this language of an eminent physiologist* it may be added, that he will be most likely to acquire this power

* Acton on the Functions, &c., p. 41.

of will who walks through the world in the spirit of a pilgrim seeking a better country, who habitually refuses to touch, taste, or handle whatever may provoke inordinate affections, and who finds his pleasure in the faithful discharge of duty in those various relationships which God Himself has ordained for our solace and support.

But has it not been admitted that such self-denial and self-discipline is impossible to flesh and blood? In the highest sense—that is, when we aim at the entire subjection of our thoughts and desires, as well as restraining ourselves from sinful actions—it is, no doubt, impossible. Very much, nevertheless, *is possible* to a resolute will, with due attention to bodily exercise and other hygienic rules. Perfect continence is not only possible, but is a source of the purest pleasure; and nothing can be more absurd than the attempt to excuse incontinence on the plea of physiological necessity. Continence, however, must be entire. "Every victory strengthens the victor." But "the first little concession, the first lost battle between the will and a temptation, is but the commencement of a long series of failures. Every succeeding conflict is harder because the last has been lost. Every defeat lessens the last trembling remnants of self-reliance."*

Let it never be forgotten, however, that if a man truly desires to mortify his members that are upon the earth, while he is careful to use all lawful means, it is necessary for him thoroughly to understand, and humbly to confess, that of himself he can effectually do nothing. With man, the crucifixion of the flesh is impossible; but not with God; for with God all things are possible. It is only an entire conviction of our own weakness and inability that can lead us to entire dependence on God;

* Acton, p. 41.

and thus we find the Apostle Paul saying, "Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me: . . . for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor. xii. 9, 10). This eminent Apostle and holy man of God was sorely distressed with what he calls "a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure" (ver. 7). No language could with more force and delicacy describe the temptations to fleshly lust which a celibate must be prepared to encounter. For this "thorn" the Apostle besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from him; meaning, it may be presumed, that the temptations which assailed him should be supernaturally quelled. And the answer of God to his prayer teaches us that we ought not to ask, or expect to receive, miraculous aid, but that God will strengthen us to will and to do. His answer to the Apostle is His answer to every humble soul that looks to Him for help in the fight of temptations: "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (ver. 9). We have no right to seek the subjugation of our carnal appetites by asking God to destroy them altogether; but we may ask, and if we ask in sincerity and humble confidence we may expect, that He will by His grace enable us to restrain those appetites within the bounds of His law, so that they may never prevail against us, and draw us into sin. His grace is sufficient for us: He is faithful to His word, and will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it (1 Cor. x. 13).

It is, however, a mere audacious mockery to ask God to help us to mortify our members, if we voluntarily expose ourselves to scenes and occasions of temptation. We must not expect God to subdue our bodily appe-

tites, while we ourselves are doing all we can to stimulate them. A life of luxury and pampering of the flesh is plainly inconsistent with an honest desire for purity and continence. Faithful and courageous discipline of the will must be combined with strict temperance; and to these must be added watchfulness, meditation in the Word, and prayer. By these the young man will be enabled to cleanse his way (Ps. cxix. 9): by these he will be kept from those evil communications which corrupt good manners: by these he will be kept in close followship with his Lord and Saviour, whose example he will keep constantly before his eyes—even the example of Him, who, though the power of the Godhead was in Him, yet obeyed as a man, and maintained His own spotless purity by the very means He enjoins upon His disciples.

The remaining verses of the passage now under consideration (31, 32) call for very brief remark. The subject of divorce is more fully treated by our Lord in the conversation He held with the Pharisees, as recorded in Matt. xix. 3-9. The Jews, in all ages, have encouraged extremely lax notions with regard to the marriage tie; and even to this day divorces are obtainable from their synagogues (at least on the Continent of Europe) with the greatest ease. One of the most eminent Rabbis enjoins, that if a man see a woman whom he loves better than his wife, he ought not to be unfaithful to his marriage vow, but should divorce his wife in a regular manner, and marry the other! This may be taken as a specimen of Rabbinical morality—of that righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, which ours must exceed, or we shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven. The Jews, however, justified their frequent divorces by reference to the law of Moses (Deut. xxiv. 1); and it was to

this passage of the law that the Pharisees referred when our Lord had reminded them that God at the beginning made man male and female—one man for one woman, and one woman for one man—and made them one flesh, so that it could not be lawful for man to put asunder what God had joined together. "Why," was the question of the Pharisees, "did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?" Our Lord replied, that this was not a Divine commandment, but only a permission of the civil magistrate, given because of the hardness of their hearts, and for the prevention of greater evils. "But from the beginning it was not so." Our Lord declares the true intent and meaning of the original law of marriage to be, that one cause alone could justify a divorce, namely, infidelity to the marriage vow. Such is the law of the Christian Church. Many interesting questions are, however, involved in this difficult subject, which cannot be discussed in these pages.

The subject to which our attention has been called is, no doubt, a painful one; but it may be hoped that its consideration will not have been unprofitable. Our blessed Lord evidently designed His sacred lessons for our profit; and if we do not profit by them, the fault must be with ourselves. The crucifixion of unholy desires is essential to our progress in the Divine life: it is profitable for us that these desires should remain ungratified, rather than that we should be cast alive into the Gehenna of Fire, "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." He that desires to reign with Christ in a glorified body, must needs strive in this life to possess his body in sanctification and honour (1 Thess. iv. 4). "The night," saith the Apostle, "is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works

of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly (decorously) as in the day ; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Rom. xiii. 12–14).

## XIV.

# YEA, YEA; NAY, NAY;

## OR, THE LAW OF CHRIST CONCERNING OATHS.

"Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the LORD (JEHOVAH) thine oaths.

"But I say unto you, Swear not at all: neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: nor by the earth; for it is His footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.

"But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil."—MATT. v. 33-37.

UR blessed Lord, having shown that the righteousness practised and taught by the scribes and Pharisees, as by authority of the traditions of old time, was eminently defective in regard to two of the most important commandments of the second table of the law, proceeds to take an example from the first table, in order to convict them yet more forcibly of perverting the law, and teaching men to break its commandments. The subject opened in the verses before us is one of considerable importance and extent; and as it involves a question in casuistry of some difficulty, and has a direct bearing upon a vice still disgracefully prevalent, it demands patient and prayerful consideration.

The Third Commandment is, "Thou shalt not take the name of JEHOVAH thy God in vain; for JEHOVAH will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in

There has never been any doubt that this commandment forbids not only perjury or false swearing, but also the vain, careless, unnecessary, or irreverent use of the name of God. *Vanity*, in the Scriptures, signifies that which is false, as well as that which is empty, light, and trivial. The gods of the heathen are called "vanities;" they who plot against Jehovah, and against His Anointed, are said to "imagine a vain thing:" *vanity* and *lies* are in fact almost convertible terms. For a *lie* is a thing that *is not*, but of which some one falsely, and with intent to deceive, asserts that *it is*. This is *vanity*. A man is not "vain" of things that he really has, but of things that he really has not, but which he imagines he has, or wishes others to believe that he has. The essential character of vanity is *unreality*, and it is therefore directly opposed to the character of God, who is "the Living and the True," and whose name is "I AM." To use the name of God, then, in attestation of anything that *is not*, is to take that name "in vain," and is manifestly a moral offence of the highest kind—against man, whom it is intended to deceive, and against God, whose majesty it directly insults and blasphemes.

The Jews have in all ages been distinguished for peculiar sensitiveness with regard to the name "Jehovah," which they deem it unlawful for a man to utter, always substituting for it, in reading the Scriptures, "ADONAI," *the Lord;* a practice which they introduced into the Septuagint translation, and in which they have been followed by subsequent translators. The wisdom of the practice is, however, very questionable, as it frequently causes misapprehension, and destroys the whole force and point of many passages. Besides, the practice originated in a superstitious error. Men are not prohibited from uttering the name of God on lawful occa-

sions, but rather are exhorted to call upon His name; neither is there any reason for holding one name in greater reverence than others, for every name of God is to be held in the highest reverence: it is simply the *irreverent* use of His name that is forbidden. The scrupulosity of the Jews was, after all, the mere outside cleansing of the cup and platter, under covert of which the grossest profanation was practised. It was one of those "traditions of the elders" by which the scribes had perverted the commandments of God. They interpreted the particular commandment now under consideration as stringently prohibiting the taking in vain of the name "Jehovah," but taught that the taking in vain of other names of God was less stringently prohibited. They taught, as Dr Lightfoot has shown by numerous citations from Rabbinical writings, that oaths sworn by "Jehovah" must be performed, and that any one swearing falsely by that great and terrible name was accursed; but that oaths by any other name of God, or by any creature of God, were of inferior obligation, and that their violation, consequently, involved an inferior degree of guilt. Under such teaching it is not surprising that the Jewish nation became addicted to the sin of profane swearing, even as were the heathen nations around them. We are not surprised to find Jeremiah complaining, that "because of swearing the land mourneth;" or to find Hosea denouncing wrath against the land, because truth, mercy, and the knowledge of God had been banished, and swearing, lying, and every abomination abounded among the people (Jer. xxiii. 10; Hosea iv. 2). And that the vices of perjury and profane swearing prevailed to a dreadful extent in our Lord's day we may reasonably infer, from His here selecting them for special rebuke, and from the explicit terms in which He prohibits them.

With a view to the elucidation of the subject, it will be necessary to inquire whether, and under what circumstances and conditions, oaths are lawful.

The Thirty-ninth Article of the Church of England is as follows :—"As we confess that vain and rash swearing is forbidden Christian men by our Lord Jesus Christ and James His apostle, so we judge, that Christian religion doth not prohibit, but that a man may swear when the magistrate requireth, in a cause of faith and charity, so it be done according to the prophet's teaching, in justice, judgment, and truth."

The Westminster Confession of Faith thus defines a lawful oath (chap. xxii.) :—"A lawful oath is a part of religious worship, wherein, upon just cause, the person swearing solemnly calleth God to witness what he asserteth or promiseth, and to judge him according to the truth or falsehood of what he sweareth. The name of God only is that by which men ought to swear; and therein it is to be used with all holy fear and reverence. Therefore, to swear vainly or rashly by that glorious and dreadful name, or to swear at all by any other thing, is sinful, and to be abhorred. Yet, as in matters of weight and moment, an oath is warranted by the Word of God, under the New Testament as well as under the Old, so a lawful oath, being imposed by lawful authority, in such matters, ought to be taken."

It may be stated, therefore, as the doctrine of the Reformed Churches generally, that it is lawful to swear by the name of God, and by that alone, in a matter of sufficient moment; that is, when the interests of truth and justice require any statement to be confirmed. And it is admitted by these Churches, with the exceptions to be hereafter mentioned, that, in their respective

jurisdictions, both civil and ecclesiastical rulers have authority, if they see fit, judicially to require witnesses to be examined before them on oath; so that, even if the witness himself think an oath unnecessary, he ought to obey the lawful authority in giving the confirmation required, and is not justifiable if he refuse so to do. These views are simply deduced from the Word of God. Let it suffice to refer to Deut. vi. 13: "Thou shalt fear JEHOVAH thy God, and serve Him, and swear by His name;" and to Isa. lxv. 16: "He that sweareth in the land shall swear by the God of truth." And the Third Commandment itself, in prohibiting false and profane swearing, or the vain use of the holy and reverend name of God, obviously implies the lawfulness of taking that name into our mouths on suitable occasions, and of swearing truly thereby.

The practice of making solemn oaths, in circumstances of importance, appears to be of the highest antiquity. The first mention of it in Scripture appears to be in the history of Abraham (Gen. xiv. 22), who lifted up his hand to Jehovah the Most High God, or, in other words, solemnly swore by the name of God, that he would take no recompense, from a thread to a shoe-latchet, from the king of Sodom. In Gen. xxiv. we find Abraham requiring his servant to take an oath that he would not take a wife for his son Isaac from the daughters of Canaan. Jacob also exacted an oath from his son Joseph that he would bury him with his fathers in the land of Canaan; and Joseph himself, on his death-bed, exacted a similar oath from the children of Israel. From these examples it may be inferred that, even with respect to personal and extrajudicial matters of solemn character, oaths are lawful, and that a man may lawfully bind himself by a vow which shall have the same obligation as an oath. The cases, however,

are very rare in which, in the present day, extrajudicial oaths can be necessary.

Under the Mosaic law the judicial oath was expressly sanctioned. In the Book of Numbers (xxx. 2), we find the following:—"If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth." In the Mosaic Law, also, we find the first mention of the "oath of adjuration," and the right of magistrates to require persons to give evidence on oath. "If a soul sin, and hear the voice of swearing" (that is, of adjuration), "and is a witness whether he hath seen or known it"—(that is, if he be judicially examined as a witness)—"if he do not utter it" (refuse to give evidence as required, on oath), "then he shall bear his iniquity." It appears that, in certain cases, where a crime had been committed, and other evidence was wanting, the magistrate or the priest was authorized to put suspected persons on their oath, and require them to swear that they were innocent; or otherwise, if they refused to take the oath, to deal with them as guilty (compare Exod. xxii. 11; Num. v. 19, 21). Parents had also authority to bind their children, and kings their subjects, by this oath of adjuration, or cursing. The story of Micah presents an example. (See Judges xvii. 2, where "about which thou cursedst" should be read "about which thou hast charged me with an oath of adjuration.") The rash adjuration of Saul (1 Sam. xiv. 24), to which his son Jonathan had well-nigh fallen a victim, will also be remembered. (Compare also Josh. vi. 26, with 1 Kings xvi. 34; and see Judges xxi. 18; 1 Kings xxii. 16; Neh. x. 29.) It was in the exercise of this official authority that the high priest put an oath of cursing or adjuration upon our blessed Lord Himself: "I adjure thee by the living God, that

thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God" (Matt. xxvi. 63). And though Jesus had resolutely held his peace while the accusations of the false witnesses were preferred against Him, and also when the chief priests and elders accused Him before Pilate, yet when solemnly adjured, or put upon His oath, by Caiaphas, who, though a wicked man, had nevertheless lawful authority, our Lord, who for our sakes was made subject to the law, did not withstand the ruler of the people, but answered, "Thou hast said: I am; and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven"* (Mark xiv. 62).

To these testimonies it may be added, that God Himself, who cannot lie, has nevertheless, in condescension to human weakness and incredulity, graciously confirmed His own word with an oath. His messages of warning and invitation by the prophets were frequently prefaced by the solemn formula of oath, "As I live, saith JEHOVAH." And to mention no other instances, it pleased God, on two occasions, to confirm with an oath the promises of the covenant which He had made with Abraham. On the first occasion (Gen. xv.), God employed the peculiar ceremonies observed by nations from the remotest times in the ratification of treaties. Animals were sacrificed, their bodies divided longitudinally down the spine, and the divided parts solemnly laid upon two altars (sometimes simply upon the ground) a few yards apart. The contracting parties then passed between the separated parts of the animals, thereby imprecating that they might in their own persons be similarly slain and cut asunder, if they violated the terms of the treaty. In

* The oath of purgation, which is still retained in the ecclesiastical law of Scotland, though now rarely, if ever administered, is a relic of the ancient oath of adjuration.

Abraham's vision, his posterity was represented by a smoking furnace, emblematical of their future sufferings in Egypt; and the Divine Presence was symbolized by a burning lamp. The furnace and the lamp, passing in the vision between the parts of the divided animals, was the impressive form of oath by which God confirmed the covenant or promise to His chosen servant Abraham, and to his seed, for ever (compare Jer. xxxiv. 18, 19). The second occasion was after the sacrifice of Isaac, recorded in Gen. xxii.; on which we have the advantage of an inspired commentary by S. Paul (Heb. vi. 13–20): "When God made promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no greater, He sware by Himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater; and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, comfirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things"—the promise and the oath, that is, which are both alike immutable—"in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to the hope set before us."

These plain testimonies of Scripture appear to establish, beyond all cavil, the lawfulness of oaths, in circumstances of great weight and importance, and more especially in matters of a judicial or federal character, according to the doctrinal standards of the principal Reformed Churches.

It is held also by the Reformed Churches that oaths are *absolutely binding*, in all cases, except where the thing sworn is contrary to the law of God.

The language of the Westminster Confession on this subject is very clear and explicit:—"An oath is to be taken in the plain and common sense of the words, without equivocation or mental reservation. It cannot oblige to sin; but in anything not sinful, being taken, it binds to performance, although to a man's own hurt; nor is it to be violated, though made to heretics or infidels."

An oath to commit a crime is from its very nature null and void; for all men, as creatures and subjects of God, are previously bound by His law, and cannot set aside that obligation. No oath of obedience to any human authority whatsoever can absolve any man from the primary loyalty and fidelity which he owes to God. To swear contrary to any requirement of Christian faith or charity is a heinous sin, demanding sincere repentance, and humble seeking of pardon through the blood of Christ. Yet such is the perversity of our fallen nature, that men are frequently found far more resolute in performing an oath or vow to do that which is evil, than to do that which is good.

The language of the Westminster Confession regarding *equivocation*, and *keeping faith with heretics*, is a necessary protest against the monstrous doctrine, openly taught by many divines of the Church of Rome, that to avoid danger, or accomplish any great benefit, oaths might be taken with secret reservations. It is also a dogma of the Papacy that the Church has power to absolve from the obligation of oaths, more especially oaths taken to heretics or infidels. More recent divines of that corrupt Church have painfully laboured to repudiate these views, and to deny that such doctrines have ever been held by their Church. The facts of history, however, cannot be recalled.

One other point only seems to require notice in connexion with the lawfulness and obligatory character of oaths, namely, that the validity of the oath is in no way affected by the form in which it is administered or taken. The most ancient form was, lifting up the hand to heaven, with the formula, "I swear by the Most High God," or other equivalent words. This form is still observed in both the civil and ecclesiastical courts of Scotland, and, by its simplicity and impressiveness, commends itself to universal approbation. Oaths of homage, fidelity, and obedience were anciently taken by placing the hand under the thigh of the superior who required the oath. In the feudal ages, oaths of allegiance were taken by the vassal placing both his hands in the right hand of his sovereign or liege lord. The oath of homage by a kiss is of the highest antiquity (Ps. ii. 12), and lingers in the ceremonial used at the coronations of our sovereigns. The practice of kissing a cross, or a book of the Gospels with a cross stamped upon it, or kissing a Bible, is a much more modern practice, and has little of either decency or dignity to recommend it, more especially when the oath is administered by a constable, or other subordinate official, instead of by the presiding judge or magistrate. All courts of justice are usually desirous of administering oaths in the form which is believed to be most binding on the conscience of the witness. The Jew is allowed to cover his head when he swears, such being the manner in which he worships God. The Chinese swear by extinguishing a taper, or by cutting off a cock's head, whereby they imprecate death to themselves if they speak falsely. Mohammedans swear by laying their hand upon the Koran; and, in short, there is no end to the variety of forms used in various ages and in various parts of the world. But the

point to be chiefly noted is, that the *form* of the oath in no way affects the obligation of it. It is the *oath* that binds, or ought to bind, and not the *form*. Consequently, no man is justified in refusing to be sworn according to the custom of the land in which he lives; and there is perjury in the very thought that the obligation of an oath can be evaded by swearing in a form different from that to which we have been accustomed, or by omitting or changing any part of the outward ceremony.

Such, then, appears to be the scriptural doctrine with respect to oaths, which is also applicable to vows and all promises made with the solemnities of an oath. The Society of Friends, the Moravians, and formerly the Anabaptists, have dissented from these views, contending that, by His express prohibition in this place, our Lord intended to discharge all oaths whatsoever. They contend that this prohibition is further enforced by the language of the Apostle James:—"But above all things, my brethren, swear not; neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation" (Jam. v. 12). And they argue that although oaths might be necessary, and were permitted under the old imperfect patriarchal and Levitical dispensations, yet a Christian man's word ought to be deemed as binding as any oath, and, consequently, that neither ought magistrates to require more from a Christian than his solemn affirmation, nor ought a Christian to submit to any other obligation.

The conscientious scruples of these well-meaning sectaries have been respected by our laws, which allow the affirmation of a Quaker, Moravian, or Separatist to be taken as equivalent to an oath in all cases of civil or

criminal procedure; a false affirmation involving the pains and penalties of perjury.* Statesmen have discovered, what polemics have, it must be confessed, been slow to admit, that to coerce men's consciences is the sure way to give currency to their peculiarities. Since full liberty of conscience has been allowed to these peace-loving and benevolent brethren, though an individual may now and then start into prominence, their principles have ceased to attract attention; and the charm of notoriety being withdrawn, they no longer excite the enthusiasm of proselytes. A brief sentence or two may therefore suffice to show that their arguments have no real weight, and are founded on a misapprehension of God's Word.

In the first place, Let it be remembered that our Lord did not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfil them. But both the Law and the Prophets unquestionably sanctioned oaths on just occasions, as is evident from citations already made: had our Lord therefore intended by His words in this place absolutely to prohibit all oaths, He would have been justly chargeable with subverting the Law and the Prophets. Secondly, It is evident that the words of our Lord, which are substantially repeated by S. James, can apply, even in the strictest interpretation, only to voluntary oaths, or oaths used in the ordinary intercourse of human life; for in both passages the prohibition is opposed to, and explained by, a positive injunction, limiting the application to "communication"—literally, speech or discourse.† S. James does not use this precise word, but his language is quite equivalent ‡—"Let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay," having reference to the habitual conversation and language of daily life between

* Act 4, Will. IV., cap. 49, and cap. 82.

† ὁ λόγος ὑμῶν. ‡ ἤτω δὲ ὑμῶν τὸ ναί, ναί, &c.

man and man. This is altogether distinct from judicial or federal transactions, in which a man does not swear, or offer to swear, of his own accord, but *is sworn*, or is required to swear, by competent authority, for the confirmation of his testimony to others, and for the abatement or avoiding of strife. Thirdly, Our Lord, if the interpretation of the non-swearing sects be correct, acted in opposition to His own teaching; for in obeying the adjuration of the High Priest, He plainly acknowledged the lawfulness of administering judicial oaths. Fourthly, The writings of the Apostle Paul afford many examples of solemn obtestations, equivalent to oaths; such as—"I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. ix. 1); "I call God for a record (witness) upon my soul" (2 Cor. i. 23); "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not" (2 Cor. xi. 31); "Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not" (Gal. i. 20); and so forth. If oaths under *any* circumstances are unlawful, how are we to explain these expressions of the Apostle, than which no oath could be more solemn and obligatory, and which were written by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost? Fifthly, It can scarcely be necessary to remind any one conversant with even the elements of Scripture criticism, that universal terms, such as "swear not at all," are frequently, and of necessity, to be understood with a limitation. "Preach the Gospel to every creature" means "to every *human* creature." In Rom. viii. 22, "the whole creation," or "every creature," means "the animated or sentient creation;" and similarly in many other places. Lastly, As to the argument from the superiority of the Christian dispensation, it may be true that a Christian man's word is as binding as his oath;

and there can be no doubt that he himself ought to feel it so. But we are not required to swear because we doubt our own word, but to give better assurance to others; and surely no Christian need feel himself humiliated in being asked to do that which God Himself condescended to do, when it was necessary to confirm with an oath the word even of Him who is the God of Truth.

There is no real difficulty, in short, in determining our Lord's meaning, or that of S. James. The key to that meaning is in the words, "Let your communication be, Yea, yea; nay, nay;" which, as has been indicated, clearly prove that our Lord spoke only with reference to the ordinary *communication*, or interchange of speech between man and man. In such intercourse he bids us avoid all oaths and adjurations, and confine ourselves to a simple affirmation or denial. He had no reference to oaths which the law of God had already sanctioned; but designed to rebuke the erroneous teaching of the scribes, and the profane and corrupt practices with respect to oaths which prevailed amongst the people. With this general key, it will not be difficult to specify particular corrupt practices, which are included in our Lord's prohibition, and in that of S. James, and which were no less opposed to the spirit of the Mosaic law than they are to the spirit of the Gospel. Our Lord did not intend to teach the people that the law which God had given by Moses was defective or inaccurate, but that it had been perverted and abused.

The law of God, then, as interpreted by our Divine COUNSELLOR, prohibits all swearing by the name of God in common discourse. This prohibition includes the names of Christ and of the Holy Spirit; and also those attributes of God which are used as names or titles, as, the Almighty, the Eternal, and the like.

The law of God also forbids all unnecessary judicial oaths. The solemnity of swearing, being an act of religious worship, is clearly restricted to occasions of grave moment. Until within a few years back, our laws were shamefully blameworthy in this respect. The most trivial transaction of business could hardly be accomplished without the formality of an oath. Perjury to a fearful extent prevailed, and, by those engaged in the details of commerce, was regarded as a very light offence, almost justifiable by the state of the law.* The statute of William IV., which substituted written declarations for oaths in various transactions, in the customs, excise, and other public departments, has taken away a disgraceful abuse, and has effected a wholesome change in the tone of our commercial morality, in which, however, there is still room for improvement.

All swearing by the works of God is likewise interdicted. We may not swear by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool. We may not swear by our heads, for that is to swear by our life, which is God's. The reason of these prohibitions is, that all God's works reflect His glory, and to swear by them is, in effect, to swear by God Himself, and is a taking of His name in vain.

For a similar reason, we may not swear by persons, places, or things, which have a real or imaginary sacredness. The Jews were wont to swear by Jerusalem, by the temple, by the altar, and the like; and the scribes profanely taught that an oath by the temple, or by the altar, was not binding, but that if one swore by the gold of the temple, or by the gift upon the altar, he

* A custom-house agent has been heard to say, that he thought nothing of taking two or three dozen oaths in the course of a morning—that he did not knowingly swear falsely, but was frequently compelled to swear when he could not know whether he swore truly or not: it was a mere matter of business!

was bound; which drew from our Lord that severe and memorable rebuke:—"Ye fools and blind! for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple which sanctifieth the gold?"—"Ye fools and blind! for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? Whosoever, therefore, shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon. And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by Him that dwelleth therein. And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by Him that sitteth thereon" (Matt. xxiii. 16–22).

The heathen were in the habit of interlarding their discourse with ejaculatory oaths, in the name of their false gods; and many professing Christians think it no shame to swear by these lying vanities, or by saints, real or fictitious. The hideous profanities which came down to us from the dark ages* may be said to be now banished from good society; but various forms of profanity still linger among us, to our national reproach. Those who thoughtlessly swear by heathen gods, or saints, do not reflect that they are swearing by devils, or demons, or souls of departed men, or perhaps by beings whose existence is wholly imaginary. The Apostles and other saints are but dead men; and as an oath is a solemn act of worship, to swear by a demon or a saint is in reality to worship him; whereas the law of God saith, "Thou shalt worship Jehovah thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."

Finally, all exclamations, ejaculations, or imprecations, in which the name or attributes of God are pro-

* William the Conqueror swore "Par le splendeur Dex!" Richard III., "by S. Paul;" Henry VIII., "by God's life;" Elizabeth, "by God's death," and "by God's wounds;" oaths which lingered long, as appears from the dramatists, in abbreviated forms. Charles II. came down to "Od's-fish!" For centuries Englishmen were known on the Continent by the sobriquet of "god-dams!"

fanely used; all light, trifling oaths, of what nature soever; and all forms of speech whatever, beyond simple affirmation or denial,—are of an evil character and tendency, and are to be avoided in our ordinary conversation.

The general lesson to be deduced from the whole passage before us is, *cultivate simplicity and purity of speech.* Chastity, in thought, word, and behaviour, is the mark of a true Christian. Whatsoever is more than plain Yea and Nay, cometh of evil (or of "the evil one," as it might with propriety be rendered), and tends, as S. James warns us, to condemnation. What can be more offensive to good taste, even apart from higher considerations, than to hear men using oaths in every sentence, and confirming even the most trivial statement by appeals to God; or to hear them, on every slight occasion,—nay, often in mere wantonness, imprecating damnation or other calamities upon themselves and others, or upon their bodies or souls! Such foul-mouthed blasphemers, whose throats belch forth corruption, as an open sepulchre emits the stenches of putrefaction (Ps. v. 9), in effect proclaim that their simple word is unworthy of belief. And, indeed, it is notoriously true, that habitual profane swearers are habitual liars also.

It is a proof of our natural depravity that oaths are, under any circumstances, necessary. The devil is a liar from the beginning, and is the father of lies. He accomplished the fall of man by inducing him to believe a lie, and it is the natural effect of that original sin that "all men are liars"—that "the wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies" (Ps. lviii. 3); by nature we are disposed to walk in darkness, and love not the truth. And it is just because men, conscious of the evil ten-

dencies of their own hearts, have no confidence in each other, that oaths are necessary. Hence the strict accuracy of our Lord's statement is evident—that whatsoever goes beyond Yea or Nay cometh from the evil one.

How deeply ought we to feel the degradation of sin, which has thus so fatally set its brand upon our whole race, that in matters of moment our statements must be confirmed with an oath! If we felt this as we ought, we should feel everything like an oath as a sad and shameful mark of our fallen condition, instead of profanely imagining that our discourse was garnished or fortified thereby. The painful reflection that oaths are in this world sometimes necessary, should have the effect of weaning our affections from the things of earth, and fixing them on that pure and holy kingdom where oaths shall be unknown, for into it shall in nowise enter any one that loveth or maketh a lie.

## XV.

# LEX TALIONIS;

## OR, THE LAW OF CHRIST CONCERNING NON-RESISTANCE.

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:
"But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away."—MATT. v. 38–42.

IN these verses we have our blessed Lord's exposition of the well-known *Lex Talionis*, or law of retaliation, from which He deduces the Christian doctrine of non-resistance, a subject encompassed with many and serious difficulties. These precepts of our Lord are not only directly opposed to the passions and practices of this world; but they have been misapprehended, and a violent construction put upon them by Quakers and other sectaries, whereby they have been made to appear contradictory to the plain teaching of other parts of Holy Scripture. Many, on the other hand, who have never been accustomed to the patient and painstaking investigation of such questions, have been led to adopt the very easy and convenient solution, that our Lord's precepts are mere figures of speech, having no definite meaning, and carrying no practical obligation. Extreme opinions on any

subject provoke contradiction; and the natural relish of the human mind for contrasts frequently prompts an assertion of opposite extremes; whereas, in the majority of cases, the truth lies in the midst. That it does so in the present instance will probably appear to the satisfaction of the intelligent and candid reader.

The *Lex Talionis*, or Law of Retaliation, was not peculiar to the criminal jurisprudence of the Mosaic economy, but, with various modifications, had a place in all the criminal codes of antiquity. The law was essentially this—that in all cases of malicious injury to life, or limb, or property, the offender should be punished by the infliction of a similar injury upon his own person or property. The law is thus defined in Exod. xxi. 23–25:—"Thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe." And again in Lev. xxiv. 17–20:—"He that killeth any man shall surely be put to death. And he that killeth a beast shall make it good; beast for beast. And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again." And in Deut. xix. 16–21, we find a curious, but most equitable extension of the law, whereby it was ordained that if any man by false accusation compassed the injury of his brother, then the judges should do to the malignant perjurer the evil that he had thought to bring upon his brother.

The enemies of Divine revelation have not failed to animadvert upon this law, which they allege is both unjust and unmerciful. For example, it is alleged that in many cases the Law of Retaliation would be too severe; as when a man having only one eye, arm, or

leg, injured another who had two, by depriving him of one of them, this law would reduce the offender to total blindness or incapability. In other cases, on the contrary, it would be quite inadequate: the injury, if inflicted by a rich man upon a poor man, would be far greater than the corresponding punishment; while, if the circumstances of the parties were reversed, the punishment would be excessive. And, generally, it is objected that the law is barbarous and vindictive, and unworthy of the Divine character.

To these allegations, which are not without plausibility, it may be replied, that the law of Moses was intended for a people just emerging from a state of slavery, and to whom practices tenfold more barbarous had been long familiar. The laws of Egypt, and of all the ancient heathen kingdoms, tolerated, and even sanctioned, private revenge; allowing injured parties to be judges in their own cases, and executioners of their own sentences; so that, for a comparatively trifling damage, death, accompanied with torture, was often inflicted; and that not only on the offender himself, but on his unoffending wife and children. In all cases, the *Lex Talionis*, when left to be administered according to the passions of men, has been the pretext for inflicting punishments greatly in excess of the injury. The judicial code of the Hebrew lawgiver, consequently, was a great amendment upon the universal practice of those rude ages. It is scarcely fair to institute a comparison between a law intended for men who had to be taught the first rudiments of political economy, and the laws of modern Christian states, the results of a completed revelation, and of the experience of three thousand years. It would be more just to compare the Mosaic code with that of Draco, Solon, or Lycurgus, or even with the Roman Laws of the Twelve Tables; all which

codes, though promulgated many centuries later than that of Moses, are greatly inferior to it both in simplicity, equity, clemency, and moral purity. Moses, or rather God speaking by Moses, sought to restrain, rather than encourage, the natural vindictiveness of men's hearts. It was therefore ordained, that when offences were committed, the offended party was not to take the law into his own hands, but must bring his complaint before the magistrate; and while moral precepts enjoined forbearance and forgiveness, strict limits were fixed, beyond which the punishment must not be carried. The law of Moses did not compel any man to exact "an eye for an eye, or a tooth for a tooth;" but supposing that the injured man saw fit to prosecute the injurer, and that the accusation was clearly proved before the magistrate, the law said, "*This* amount of punishment you may demand, but no more: the aggressor shall be punished to the extent of the injury he has done, but no further." Surely, that was just, and merciful too, regard being had, not only to the injured individual, but also the general welfare of the community.*

It is not to be denied, indeed, that, in some exceptional cases, the Law of Retaliation, even as limited by Moses, might operate unequally. But the same objection may be made against every law; for the different circumstances of parties cause that to be a severe punishment in one case, which in another is scarcely any punishment at all. The experience of mankind, however, soon led to the modification of this law, by substi-

* "'Oculum pro oculo, dentem pro dente,' non fomes, sed limes, furoris est; non ut id quod sopitum erat inde accenderetur, sed ne id quod ardebat ultra extenderetur, impositur."—*Augustine.*—(The law of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," was imposed, not as an encouragement of anger, but as a check upon it; not that the rage which had been mollified should thence be inflamed, but that that which was already burning should not pass the limits assigned.)

tuting pecuniary compensation for the literal "eye for eye." In barbaric states, where all the wealth, and, indeed, property of every kind, were in the hands of the regal and sacerdotal castes, and the inferior castes had nothing which they could call their own, the *Lex Talionis*, in some shape or other, was the simplest, and in most countries the only means of punishing wrong-doers. But as civilization extended, and property became more diffused, it became possible to attain the ends of justice more fully, by estimating the damage actually done in every case, and awarding equitable compensation, with due consideration of the circumstances of all concerned. The law of Moses forbade any composition being accepted for the life of a murderer;* but left it open to accept such composition for other injuries. This practice of punishing offenders by compelling them to pay damages prevails in all civilized countries in the present day; and it has this advantage, that while it preserves the essential principle of the *Lex Talionis*, as defined by Moses, in punishing offenders in a degree proportioned to their offence, it also affords substantial redress to the injured person.

Considering the Law of Retaliation, then, simply as a legislative provision intended to guide the magistrate in his judicial sentences, it cannot be pronounced either unrighteous or unmerciful. It speaks the language of strict justice, and tempers judgment with mercy in restraining the vindictive passions of men. But the scribes and Pharisees, instead of interpreting the law according

* The compounding of murder by accepting pecuniary fines has been the blot of legislation in all ages, wherever it has prevailed, and was a stain upon Christian Europe till the fourteenth or fifteenth century. The Salic law of the Franks fixed the *weregild*, or composition for murder, at sums from 300 to 45 shillings, according to the rank of the murdered person. Among the Anglo-Saxons, the *weregild* for a king's thane was 1200 shillings; for a freeholder, 600 shillings; for a churl, 200 shillings.

to the obvious intention of the lawgiver, made it void, by suffering it to be taken, not as a guide for the civil magistrate, but as the rule of private revenge. They taught that an injured man might himself retaliate upon his aggressor by inflicting a corresponding injury; and it is well known that under this corrupt teaching the grossest outrages were sanctioned, as will always be the case wherever men are suffered to be their own avengers.

Now, it is not against the Law of Retaliation as given by Moses that our Lord's precepts are directed; but against the perversion of that law by the blind guides of the Jewish people. The *principles* of the Mosaic law, whether political or ceremonial, were founded in absolute truth, justice, mercy, and purity: they could not be otherwise, coming, as they did, from the fountain of truth and holiness. Our blessed Lord repealed none of those principles: He could not do so, for *principles* are in their nature immutable. The principles of jurisprudence contained in the Mosaic code are binding still; though various modifications have been found necessary in the application and administration of them. Our Lord does not teach us to condemn the law, which is holy, and just, and good; but He teaches us to regard the spirit of it rather than the letter, and would caution us against those who corrupt the Word of God, whether by adding to it, or diminishing from it.

The principle which our Lord enunciates in opposition to the teaching of the scribes, is, "That ye resist not evil."* The word translated "resist" signifies "to set one's self against," or "oppose," as men personally oppose one another in battle, where blows are given and retaliated. And the word "evil" may be understood either of persons or things; though here it is

* μὴ ἀντιστῆναι τῷ πονηρῷ.

obviously not intended to refer to the devil, the evil one, for S. James expressly enjoins (iv. 7), "Resist the devil;" nor to evil men, or evil works, generally, for it is a Christian man's duty to resist the enemies of God, and to counteract their malignant devices (Jude 3). What our Lord forbids is, *the personally setting ourselves against, or retaliating upon, those who may do us a personal injury.* And that it may more clearly appear that what He said had reference to private and personal injuries only, and had no reference to the administration of the law by the civil magistrate, He specifies three examples of personal injury, all of them of a comparatively trivial nature, and such as may safely be suffered to pass unpunished without compromising the public welfare. Of these three examples, it will be observed, that one is a trifling injury to the person; another a trifling injury to the property; and the third is a trifling invasion of the personal liberty. It seems reasonable to conclude, that, by selecting such examples, our Lord designed to indicate the nature and relative importance of those injuries to which His precept of non-resistance should apply.

With a view to a fuller elucidation of this precept, it may be considered, first, *negatively;* that is, we may inquire, What it does *not* forbid?

Our Lord does not forbid the bearing of arms in just, honourable, and necessary warfare. The Society of Friends, and others, have maintained that under the Christian dispensation all war is unlawful. "War," says Thomas Evans, of Philadelphia, one of the ablest Quaker apologists, "is wholly at variance with the spirit of the Gospel, which continually breathes peace on earth, and good-will to men."* The Peace Society, to which reference has been made in a former chapter,† made a

* Cyclopædia of Religious Denominations. † *Vide supra*, p. 98.

vigorous attempt to induce a general acceptance of the principle, that all national disputes should be settled by arbitration. But the scheme will not hold water. Suppose, for a moment, that the European Powers were to enter into a treaty, binding themselves to adopt the arbitration scheme. What security is there for the observance of such a treaty beyond the good faith of the existing sovereigns, or of their ministers of state? Without supposing the possibility of perfidy in any of them, what would be the result in the event of a revolution, and a consequent change of dynasty, or of constitution? The new government would feel at liberty to ignore all compacts entered into by the old, and some military adventurer might be expected to appear, who, in his career of personal ambition, would laugh to scorn all restraints or obstacles not of a strictly physical character. And is it to be believed, that even Quakers would sit still, did a foreign invader appear, and not raise an arm to defend their homes and their hearths?

The progress of the arts of civilization, of commerce, and of science, to say nothing of Christian principle, is slowly teaching the kings and states of this world the folly of war and the blessedness of peace. But there is no probability that wars will really cease in the earth, until the Prince of peace shall have come, under whose benignant sceptre there shall be no more cause for war. Till that day come, war will, unhappily, be at times necessary. Every Christian must heartily condemn wars of mere conquest or revenge, as being repugnant to the principles of the Gospel; and must fully recognize the duty of exhausting all pacific efforts before the sword is drawn and the scabbard flung away; but there is nothing in the New Testament, any more than in the Old, to prohibit defensive warfare, or warfare under-

taken for the succour of the oppressed, or for the repression of mad ambition which menaces the peace of the world.

That there is nothing in the profession of arms inconsistent with Christian character may be inferred from various incidents in the New Testament history. The Roman soldiers, who came to the preaching of John the Baptist, were not enjoined by that uncompromising witness for God's truth and law to abandon their profession, but simply to "do violence to no man, and to be content with their wages" (Luke iii. 14). One of our blessed Lord's most remarkable miracles was the healing of the centurion's servant (Luke vii. 2–10). The centurion was not rebuked for following an unlawful profession, but his faith was highly commended, and his request granted. Nor should it be forgotten that the first Gentile to whom the Gospel was savingly preached after the day of Pentecost, when the Gospel dispensation may be said to have been formally inaugurated, was a Roman soldier. The Apostle Peter was expressly sent to Cornelius to tell him what he ought to do (Acts x. 6). Peter accordingly spake unto this godly centurion the word of the Lord, and while he yet spake, "the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word" (ver. 44). Is it conceivable that, if war is under all circumstances unlawful, Cornelius should not have been commanded to retire from the Roman army? It cannot be necessary to mention the names of such Christian soldiers as Colonel Blackadder, or Colonel Gardiner; or within our own times, of Havelock, Hammond, or Hedley Vicars, to prove that a man is neither a worse soldier for being a Christian, nor a worse Christian for being a soldier.

Our Lord does not forbid the resisting of an evil man, when such resistance is necessary for the defence of our

own life, or property, or for the protection of our families. The Gospel requires no man to submit tamely to the attack of a robber or a murderer, nor to witness without resistance the spoliation of his goods, or the maltreatment of those dependent upon him.

Neither is it forbidden to endeavour to prevent deeds of violence or injustice, or a repetition of them, by proper remonstrance. When the powers of this world have taken up the sword of persecution, Christians have indeed been commended for taking joyfully the spoiling of their goods (Heb. x. 34); and on a memorable occasion our Lord distinctly commanded Peter, saying, "Put up thy sword into the sheath" (John xviii. 11). Yet our Lord, though He suffered Himself to be led as a lamb to the slaughter, did not fail to remonstrate when He was unjustly and cruelly smitten: "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?" (ver. 23). And as our civil and religious liberties are as precious, to say the least, as our lives and property, it cannot be less lawful, if the unhappy occasion should arise, to draw the sword in defence of the former than of the latter.

Neither does the precept of non-resistance prohibit our seeking protection from injury, or redress of it, from a lawful tribunal. Nor does it forbid our asserting, temperately, but firmly, our just rights as men or citizens. The Apostle Paul exhibited true Christian meekness under the persecutions to which he was exposed for the sake of the Gospel; but he never hesitated to assert his rights as a Roman citizen; and when he could not obtain justice from the Roman procurator, he boldly appealed to the emperor himself.

In a word, our Lord's precept must not be interpreted so as to place it in antagonism to our manifest duties. We have duties to ourselves, duties to our families, duties

to society at large. These duties, as well as the relationships from which they spring, are appointments of God, and are not to be sacrificed to a mere theory, however attractive. It is obviously inconsistent with our relative duties that violent or fraudulent persons should be permitted to practise their evil deeds with impunity, or that assassins and depredators should be turned loose upon the world. The interests of mankind demand that criminals should be punished. The civil ruler is the minister of God to us *for good*. And so far from not resisting evil men or evil deeds, his very office implies that he should be for the punishment of evil-doers, as well as for the praise of them that do well. He is the minister of God; a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Our Lord's precept, therefore, cannot be intended to interfere with the due administration of justice by lawful authority, to which we are expressly commanded to be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake (Rom. xiii. 3–5; 1 Pet. ii. 14).

Having endeavoured to clear the way by this negative view of the precept of non-resistance, we are better prepared for the direct and positive inquiry, What *does* our Lord here forbid and enjoin?

He forbids all private revenge, or retaliation of personal injuries. The civil ruler is the only lawful avenger in this world,* and he acts not as the instrument of human vindictiveness, but as the minister of God, to whom alone vengeance of right belongs. Private indi-

* The Mosaic law, in cases of homicide not amounting to murder, appointed cities of refuge to which the manslayer might flee to escape the *avenger of blood*—that is, the nearest of kin to the slain man, who, according to immemorial usage, had the right personally to kill the slayer. The goël, or avenger, was not a Mosaic institution, but was tolerated as almost necessary in a semi-barbaric age, and his powers were stringently regulated.

viduals may not arrogate the functions of the civil ruler. If an injury be done to us, of such magnitude that public justice demands the punishment of the aggressor for the protection of the community, our duty is to delate the offender to the constituted authorities, and leave them to deal with the case according to law. Even if the case be merely one of insult, where no bodily harm has been done, and no property destroyed or damaged, but where the feelings have been grossly outraged, as by a contemptuous blow, by contumelious language, or the like—if this be done publicly, so that suffering the aggressor to escape might endanger the peace of the community, public duty requires that he should be punished. But when the injury is private and of small magnitude, and when no social wrong can result from forbearance, our Lord teaches us to forbear; nay, so far from attempting to retaliate, it would be better to turn the other cheek to the smiter. He Himself did far more than He bids us do: He gave His back to the smiters, and His cheek to them that plucked off the hair; He hid not His face from shame and spitting (Isa. l. 6). For His sake, who did evil to none, yet suffered so much evil from others for us, it well becomes us to bear and forbear. The servant of Christ, the child of God, the heir of the world, has no business with revenge. "I will repay, saith the Lord." "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. xii. 21).

Our Lord also forbids all litigation in trivial matters. If a man threaten us with a suit at law, and would take away our inner garment, it is better to let him have it voluntarily, yea, and to let him have the outer garment also, than to involve ourselves in all the anxieties and expenses of legal proceedings.* The Apostle Paul

* The χιτών, or tunic, was a garment that fitted closely to the body, sometimes with sleeves and sometimes without, and reaching below the

simply repeats this precept, when he writes to the Corinthians: "Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, that ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?" (1 Cor. vi. 7.) The Apostle recommends the settlement of private disputes by arbitration; and it were much to be wished that this practice were more frequently adopted, at least in cases where such a settlement was likely to be final. Some Christian denominations make it obligatory on their members to abide by arbitration, and to avoid litigation. But it is a straining of the Apostle's language to infer from it that Christians are forbidden, under any circumstances, to have recourse to the tribunals of justice. The passage just cited refers to the tribunals of the heathen. For Christians to drag one another before heathen magistrates (unbelievers) was injurious to the cause of the Gospel, which commands its followers to regulate all their proceedings by the law of love. Our circumstances in the present day are very different. We live in a Christian land, under Christian laws, administered by professedly Christian judges and magistrates; and an appeal to such tribunals, when disputes cannot be privately adjusted, is, in fact, Christian arbitration, and that of the most competent kind. In all matters of sufficient importance, therefore, Christians are justified in appealing to the legal tribunals of their country. In many cases it is a public duty to do so; for matters continually arise for which the law has made no provision, or concerning which the law is uncertain; and it is for the public expediency that the law should be declared or expounded. But the precept of Christ forbids all vexatious or vindictive litigation; all litiga-

knees. The ἱμάτιον was the outer garment, or cloak. These were the only garments ordinarily worn among the Jews

tion for the redress of mere private and personal wrongs, where the public justice is not concerned; all unnecessary and oppressive delay, where legal proceedings are unavoidable; and all refusal of, or unwillingness to accept, reasonable terms of adjustment.*

Our Lord also forbids us to deny our time or trouble for the service of others. The word† here translated "compel" is of Persian origin. Cyrus the Great, King of Persia, was the first that established a public postal service.‡ He organised a regular staff of royal couriers, or messengers, who travelled on the public business throughout the whole empire.‡. These *Angari*, as they were called, had authority to impress men and horses into the public service, when necessary, at a fixed rate of remuneration. The Romans, in the time of Christ, and for some time previously, had a similar kind of postal system; and it appears from Josephus that the Jews had felt it peculiarly grievous that they were compelled to furnish posts for the Roman Government.§ From the use of this peculiar word, some have accordingly supposed that our Lord referred only to compul-

* An anecdote of the last century, bearing upon the precept of non-resistance, is not unworthy of preservation. A Methodist preacher, returning one dark night from a prayer-meeting by a lonely cross-road, was attacked by two footpads, who demanded his money. The trifle he had did not satisfy them, and he was ordered to take off his top-coat. He did so without hesitation. They demanded his inner coat also, which he yielded without demur, and waited till the thieves had put them on their own persons. Then he said, "Now, I have done what you asked me: will you do one little thing for me before you go?" "Well, what is it?" "Why," said he, "let us kneel down, and ask the blessing of God on what we have been doing!" He knelt on the road, and was beginning to pray, when one of the thieves said to the other, "Jack, we had better let this fellow alone, or we shall have no luck." On which they threw down the garments of which they had despoiled him, and ran off. (Comp. Prov. xvi. 7.)

† ἀγγαρεύσει. ‡ The service was called ἀγγαρήϊον, Herodot. viii. 98.

§ Joseph. Antiq. xiii. 2, 3.

sory travelling on the public service; but it would seem that the word had been adopted into the Greek language,* and also that it had been naturalized by the Jews after their return from Babylon, and was commonly used to signify the compelling any one, by force or urgent entreaty, to travel, or carry a burden, or perform any labour, on business not strictly his own. This is what every man is frequently required to do. We are liable to be compelled to travel many miles as witnesses, or jurymen, in the public service. The cause of religion or charity often requires us to take long journeys and otherwise to sacrifice our time and convenience; and our Lord's precept is, that we should do these things not grudgingly, but with a ready mind, when the path of duty is clear, notwithstanding the inconvenience that may arise, and the inadequate compensation we may receive. Nay, such is the self-sacrificing spirit of the Gospel, that we should be ready to do even more than is required. In a case of urgency, instead of grumbling at being obliged to go a short distance, we should be willing to go twice as far, in the service of God or man.

Finally, our Lord enjoins a general spirit of liberality. "Give to him that asketh thee; and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." This precept, like the others included in the Law of Non-resistance, must necessarily be limited by previous obligations. A man may not give or lend the money which is necessary to pay his lawful debts, or to provide for his family: concerning such money he may lawfully say, He has it not to spare: it is not, in fact, his own. Nor may a man give or lend indiscriminately, but only where he will do good,† not to encourage improvidence or rash speculation, or habits of profusion, inconsistent

* *Vide* Suidæ et Scapulæ Lex. in verbis ἄγγαρος et ἀγγαρεύω.

† Alford has an excellent note on this verse.

not only with Christian prudence, but with common honesty. The Psalmist declares it to be a characteristic of "a good man," not only that he "showeth favour," or kindness, "and lendeth;" but also that "he will guide his affairs with discretion" (Ps. cxii. 5). And Solomon saith, "He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it; and he that hateth suretiship is sure" (Prov. xi. 15). But when every necessary allowance and limitation has been made, it will be found that a large margin is left for Christian generosity. Probably there is no duty so imperfectly understood, or so reluctantly practised, as that of Christian *giving*. That which a man gives for applause, or yields to importunity; that which a man gives because others give, or because he does not wish to be reproached as covetous, is not really a gift, but a barter. It is a price paid for an equivalent, in the praise of men, or in exemption from censure. With *such* sacrifices God is *not* well pleased. But on this subject it will be necessary to speak more largely when our Lord's teaching on the duty of alms-doing comes to be considered.

Such, then, is the law of Christ concerning non-resistance. However men of the world may affect to despise the submissive and complying spirit inculcated by the meek and lowly Jesus, His precepts will bear the tests both of reason and of experience. It may be asserted, not as a paradox, but as the language of truth and soberness, that the man who acts on the principle of non-resistance enjoys greater peace and security, and suffers less from aggression and injustice, than those who act on the opposite principle. And the reason is simply this: the man who feels that the law of his God and the example of his Saviour prohibit him from resenting an injury, will naturally cultivate an inoffensive style of speech and behaviour. He will do nothing intentionally to provoke

insult or injury, and as a consequence, he will not be likely to receive either. To attack or insult a woman, or a man whose profession or known principles debar him from the indulgence of resentment, is universally stigmatized as cowardice. On the contrary, the man who goes about the world, bristling at all points, ready to take offence, sudden and fierce in quarrel, uncompromising in the exaction of his "pound of flesh," and unrelenting in his hatred and revenge—such a man is respected by few, beloved by none. A peaceful man is not necessarily a coward; nay, there is more true courage in passing by and forgiving an injury, than in resenting it. Such courage is the offspring of true wisdom. "Yielding pacifieth great offences" (Eccles. x. 4); "A soft tongue breaketh the bone" (Prov. xxv. 15); "A soft answer turneth away wrath" (Prov. xv. 1). Such was the wisdom, such the courage, of Him whose name is "COUNSELLOR;" and who died, leaving us an example that we should walk in His steps. "When He was reviled, He reviled not again: when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously" (1 Pet. ii. 23).

May that mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus! Amen.

## XVI.

## THE LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOUR.

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

"For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."—MATT. v. 43-48.

HAVING specified several particular instances in which the scribes and Pharisees had made void the law of God by their traditions, falsifying its teaching, relaxing its weightiest obligations, and encouraging practices utterly at variance with its true spirit, our Lord, in the verses now before us, presents another example, of a more general character, apparently with the intention of summing up His previous instructions, and presenting to His hearers the pith and marrow of the whole law. Formally, He seems to refer to the second table of the law only, the sum of which is, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;" but substantially He includes all the Ten Commandments; for we find the second table frequently spoken of as comprehending the whole law.

When the young wealthy ruler asked Christ what

good thing he should do, that he might inherit eternal life, the Lord replied, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." And when the young man asked Him which commandments He meant, He did not mention any of the ceremonial commandments, nor did He rehearse the whole Decalogue, but only the commandments of the second table, obviously implying that perfect obedience to these necessarily implied obedience to the first table also (Mark x. 17–19). So we find S. Paul saying, "He that loveth another hath fulfilled the law;" and, after reciting the commandments of the second table only, he adds, "and if there be *any other commandment*, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. xiii. 8–10). And in his Epistle to the Galatians (v. 14) we find the same Apostle even more explicitly declaring, "All the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

It is plain, therefore, that the love of our neighbour, rightly understood, comprehends the whole duty of man, all that can be included in Solomon's definition, "Fear God, and keep His commandments" (Eccles. xii. 13). Nor is there any difficulty in such a statement. We cannot love God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our strength, and with all our mind, unless we love our neighbour as ourselves. To love our neighbour thus is to recognize him as our equal in God's sight, as having equal natural rights with ourselves, as inheriting the same sinful flesh as ourselves, and as included with ourselves in the same proclamation of mercy. To acknowledge this, not merely as a formal doctrine, but as a rule of life, is to acknowledge the sovereignty of God, *from* whom are all things, and *to*

whom are all things, and who justly claims, absolutely and entirely, the homage and supreme affections of all His creatures. To love our neighbour as ourselves, in short, lays the axe to the root of that *selfishness*, which is the parent of all sin and rebellion against God.

The scribes and Pharisees had grossly perverted this "royal law," as S. James calls it (ii. 8), by a profane and corrupt addition of their own; for whereas Moses wrote, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Lev. xix. 18), they, in their teaching, wholly omitted the words "as thyself," and gave forth the commandment thus, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy." They taught that the term "neighbour" included only a man's friends, the members of his own family, the citizens of his own country, or those dwelling in his immediate vicinity; falsely assuming, moreover, that to love the children of our own people, or our personal friends, necessarily implied hatred of those who were beyond this pale, and especially of those who have acted towards ourselves in a spirit of hostility.* Such an inter-

* See above, p. 176, *note*. It is difficult to understand how the learned Dean Alford could imagine that, either in the instance now under consideration, or in the two last considered, viz., Oaths and Retaliation, the traditional teaching was in accordance with the law. His note on ver. 43 appears equally objectionable with that on ver. 21. The "odium humani generis," with which the heathen charged the Jews—or, as Tacitus more explicitly defines it, "apud ipsos fides obstinata, misericordia in promptu, sed adversus omnes alios hostile odium" (Historiar., V. 5)—in so far as it had any foundation, is to be traced, not to the pure and holy law of God, but to the perversions of the scribes. The Dean admits that the latter part of the maxim, as here quoted, namely, "and hate thine enemy," is a Rabbinical gloss; but nevertheless he asserts, with strange want of caution, that the said gloss "is a true representation of the spirit of the law, which was enacted for the Jews as a theocratic people." It is, indeed, true that the Jews were commanded to abstain from intercourse with other nations, but that was because other nations were idolaters, and because association with idolaters frequently led the peculiar people into idolatry, with all its concomitant abominations. But they were nowhere commanded to hate them,

pretation is wholly unwarranted by the law of Moses, which, though specially designed for the children of Israel under a theocracy, breathed a spirit of love and charity to all mankind. It is not to be deemed inconsistent with this spirit, that the righteous vengeance of God was denounced against the Amalekites and Canaanites, whom the children of Israel were commanded to exterminate, or that the Ammonite and the Moabite were excluded from the congregation of the Lord, and the chosen people forbidden to seek their peace and prosperity (Deut. xxiii. 3–8). These, and others like these, were judicial ordinances for exceptional and extreme cases, designed to impress upon the Israelites God's abhorrence of the sins of those nations, as well as to warn them against all communication with those who had proved themselves enemies of God and His cause, and were of notoriously profligate and abandoned manners. No one who remembers the facts of the later history of the nation, and the evils brought about by their intercourse with Moab and Ammon, evils which culminated in the dismemberment of the kingdom (1 Kings xi. 1, 7, 11), can suppose that these exclusive laws were unnecessarily severe. Yet even the most exclusive restrictions were limited: the Ammonite and the Moabite were not excluded beyond the tenth generation; the Egyptians and Edomites not beyond the second: and as to these last, the Jews were expressly forbidden to abhor them. And whatever the law commanded with regard to *nations as such*, it in no way sanctioned unkindly sentiments against individuals of those nations, or prohibited acts of charity towards them, if they had need of such. The Jews were taught,

or forbidden to do good to them, nationally or individually. They were rather enjoined to seek their peace, and to pray for them. (See Jer. xxix. 7; Ezra vi. 10.)

by the corrupt traditions of the elders, to regard all Gentiles as enemies, and to hate them accordingly; but what saith the law of God? "If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him." In the Proverbs of Solomon we find the same precept in another form: "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head,* and the Lord shall reward thee" (xxv. 21). The Apostle Paul has quoted these words of Solomon (Rom. xii. 20); and it is not uncommon to hear professing Christians, even those who might be expected to be better informed, producing this very precept triumphantly from the Epistle to the Romans, as a specimen of the higher and more heavenly morality which they suppose is taught in the New Testament, as compared with the

* That is, *cover him with shame and remorse;* not that this should be our final aim, but in order to bring about a reconciliation. The other interpretation, which was at one time generally accepted, namely, "Thou shalt add to his condemnation," is inadmissible. No one presumes to suppose that this can be set before us as a *motive;* and if the language is to be understood as a *prediction*, it is necessary, as Locke and others who have taken this view are compelled to admit, to suppose the persevering malice of the "enemy." But surely the reason for commanding us to show kindness to an enemy is, that we may thus make a friend of him. This is the Christian ideal of revenge—God's own ideal—for it was while we were enemies that Christ died for us. The doom of the finally impenitent is in the hands of Him to whom vengeance belongeth. As regards injuries done to ourselves, *we* have no right even to *think* of vengeance. See Poole, Wetstein, Locke, and Schleusner, who support their harsh and uncharitable interpretation by reference to the later fathers. Some of the earlier fathers supposed the "coals of fire" to be a metaphor taken from the process of fusing of metals, meaning, "Thou shalt melt him to kindness," as the metal in a crucible is melted by the fire with which it is covered. Without insisting on the supposed metaphor, the more ancient interpretation is to be preferred.

Old, in utter unconsciousness or oblivion that this is in fact an Old Testament precept, formally announced in the law of Moses, and practically exemplified long before in the lives of Abraham and Joseph (Gen. xiv. 14–16; xviii. 23; l. 21).

Our Divine COUNSELLOR, in the passage now under consideration, expounds the true intent and meaning of the second table of the law, which the scribes had perverted. Our "neighbour," whom we are commanded to love equally with ourselves, is *every man*, including our enemies, those that hate us, those that curse, revile, oppose, and slander us, and those that despitefully use us and persecute us.

This comprehensive definition of the term "neighbour" our Lord admirably illustrated on another occasion, to which it may be proper to refer (Luke x. 25–37). A certain lawyer, or scribe, a teacher and expounder of the Mosaic law, having asked, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" our Lord referred him to the law itself: "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" The lawyer quoted the sum of the Ten Commandments from Deut. vi. 5, and Lev. xix. 18. Jesus said unto him, "Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live." The scribe no doubt had expected a different answer: probably he imagined our Lord would have prescribed some extraordinary effort of zeal or self-denial, and felt humbled and disappointed by the plain direct answer to his question, which he had himself been obliged to furnish. Not willing to admit his defeat, however, and though rebuked, not willing to acknowledge his error, but seeking matter for self-justification, he raised a question respecting the signification of "neighbour;" asking, "And who is my neighbour?" To which Jesus replied by the well-known and affecting parable of the good Samaritan. A certain man, on the

lonely mountain road between Jerusalem and Jericho was attacked by armed bush-rangers, and by them stripped, and left by the road-side, wounded and half-dead. The victim of this deed of violence was a Jew; and consequently, according to the doctrine of the scribes themselves, every Jew at least was his neighbour, and bound by the law to love him and to succour him. And if any were especially under obligation to do this, surely the priests and Levites were so, as being the ministers of God's sanctuary and ordinances, to whom deeds of piety and charity ought to have been familiar. Both a priest and a Levite, nevertheless, saw the wounded traveller, and instead of helping him, passed by on the other side.* The kind offices, which his own brethren refused or neglected, were done to him by a Samaritan, one of those whom the Jews regarded as infidels and unclean, and consequently enemies, with whom they could hold no intercourse or communication whatever. "Which now, of these three," was our Lord's question to the scribe, "was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise."

Our blessed Lord, therefore, teaches us to love all mankind, specifying more particularly those whom we are naturally indisposed to love, and whom, indeed,

* A large amount of declamation is often unnecessarily expended in denouncing the conduct of the priest and the Levite, as if it were so outrageously bad, that nothing of the kind could be witnessed in a Christian country. But these men (it is difficult to forget that the story is a parable, and not a history) would not have been without specious excuses. They were probably travelling on duty, and limited as to time. Or they might have feared the return of the thieves, and possibly might have had money for which they were responsible. Or they might have thought the poor man past help, and intended to give information to the proper authorities. These excuses are not a complete justification, but they are such as we find men making every day. The story is not so entirely without parallel as many have supposed.

we cannot love without the transforming influences of Divine grace, subduing our evil tempers, and making us new creatures in Christ Jesus.

Love your enemies! Such is the true spirit of God's righteous and merciful law. No system of morals devised by man has ever ventured to propound such a precept in direct terms. We do, indeed, find in heathen writers occasional hints of something approaching to it. In a conversation respecting the policy of kings, a distinguished ancient writer* makes one of the interlocutors quote a maxim of antiquity, "A king should do good to his friends, and evil to his enemies;" to which it was replied, "How much better would it be to do good to our friends, and make friends of our enemies!" Thus far heathen moralists have gone. They have, in some instances, recommended men to make friends of their enemies, as a matter of policy, and to convert their hostility into friendship. But this, obviously, comes far short of the morality of Jesus, who teaches us, not merely to conciliate our enemies, or to revenge ourselves by doing them an outward act of kindness, when they would naturally look for evil at our hands, but to *love them.* His precept, it will be observed, goes to the source of all our thoughts, words, and actions, namely, the heart and its affections; for it is in the subordination of our affections to God's law that true obedience consists.

Love your enemies! It is much that both reason and experience are found to confirm the precepts of Divine wisdom; but reason and experience, though they may satisfy us as to the expediency of a particular course of action, and take away all excuse from those who persist in the opposite course, can never overcome the natural

* Plutarch, Apophthegm, Lacon. Other citations from heathen writers may be found in Wetstein, on Rom. xii. 20.

malignity and vindictiveness of our own hearts. These monitors, echoing in our souls, as they do, the voice of God's law, may convince us that conciliation is prudent, and that revenge is a mark of a weak and narrow mind; but they cannot enable us to *love our enemies.* And there is reason to fear that many, not merely of those who make no profession of religion, but of those who call themselves Christians, and are reputed as such, knowing how entirely this precept is opposed to the natural heart, either regard it as impracticable, or accept it with such restrictions and modifications as reduce it to the level of mere human morality.

On one point, indeed, there must, of necessity, be a limitation. For there are *two* kinds of love—distinguished as the *love of complacency*, and the *love of benevolence.* The love of complacency, that is, of *approbation and delight*, is the love wherewith the Father loves the Son, and His people in Him,—the love which was expressed in the voice that came from the excellent glory, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." This is the love wherewith the believer loves God, and Christ the Saviour, and all his fellow-believers, as members of the same body: it implies, not only affection, but also approbation and esteem. The love of benevolence, on the other hand, is the love wherewith God loves sinners, though He is angry with them every day (Ps. vii. 11); and *this* is the love wherewith we are commanded to love our enemies. We are not enjoined to regard evil words and deeds with *complacency;* nor is it possible for a child of God permanently to entertain such a sentiment towards the men that speak and do these things. To do so is expressly declared to be the characteristic of a reprobate mind (Rom. i. 28, 32). We find the Psalmist saying in one psalm (cxxxix. 21, 22), "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate Thee? and

am I not grieved with those that rise up against Thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies." Yet concerning these same enemies, he saith in another psalm (xxxv. 13, 14), "As for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom: I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother: I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother." It is right, therefore, that we should hate all the works and ways of wicked men, and avoid all such communication with them, as may lead them or others to suppose that we sympathize with them in their rebellious contempt of God. We are specially commanded to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, and to put away from our communion all perverters of the truth of God, and all that by their impure lives bring reproach upon the Gospel (1 Cor. v. 11, 13; Eph. v. 11; 1 Tim. i. 20). But even the notoriously heretical and scandalous are to be treated personally with tenderness; and even if they are excommunicated, it is only for the destruction of the flesh, and that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. v. 5). We are, in short, to love the men, though we hate their sins. We must continue to love them, and to watch and pray for opportunities of recovering them, even though their conduct renders it impossible for us to have fellowship with them.

Our Lord teaches us how this love towards our enemies is to be shown. "Bless them that curse you!" Render not railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing; remembering that "grievous words stir up anger." Be not tempted to speak evil of them, present or absent; but rather seek that your hearts may be filled with that Divine love which "thinketh no evil," and in all things be active promoters of peace and good-will. "Do good

to them that hate you!" If you have reason to fear that any one hates you, consider whether you may not have given provocation, and if it be so, endeavour to remove it. If it proceed from a misunderstanding, be not too proud to explain. If, like our great Master and Exemplar, you are hated *without a cause*, repay hatred with love. If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Him before it hated you; but who is he that shall harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? (1 Pet. iii. 13.) A true follower of the Lord Jesus, who habitually exercises himself to have a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men (Acts xxiv. 16), will neither be terrified by the frowns of the world, nor flattered by its smiles. Seek opportunities of doing good, both to the bodies and souls of men; and if ye meet with hatred and ingratitude, yea, even though a host should encamp against you, be confident in the Lord that judgeth righteously. But, above all, "Pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you!" By this test you may most effectually prove yourselves. Can you *pray* for your enemies? If you have, or are tempted to have, ill feelings against any one, it is on your knees before the throne of grace that you will most easily overcome them. It is thus that you may overcome evil with good. Thus you will feel that the Mighty Lord is on your side, and will not fear what man can do unto you (Ps. cxviii. 6). Thus you will feel enlargement and encouragement in all your approaches to Him. You will experience an elevation of soul which will enable you to stand unmoved amidst the noise of waters and the shock of battle; and your heart will glow with compassion and forgiveness even for the man that has most deeply injured you.

Our Lord having thus expounded the Divine law, and set forth the duty of loving our neighbour in the

most comprehensive sense, enforces the reasonableness of this duty by two considerations.

The first of these is, "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." In the ordinary dealings of His providence God treats all men alike, making no apparent distinction between the righteous and the wicked. In the distribution of His temporal blessings it appears as though God regarded all men alike, without reference to their individual character. And similarly with respect to His chastisements. The just and the unjust share equally in the afflictions of His hand. This apparent absence of distinction between those that serve God, and those that serve Him not, has often been a stumbling-block to believers, who, like Asaph, are envious at the foolish, when they see the prosperity of the wicked (Ps. lxxiii. 3). They do not reflect that, when viewed in the light of God's revealed character, as a God of infinite holiness, justice, and truth, this even-handed distribution of benefits in this life, to the evil and the good alike, is the very strongest evidence that there is a judgment to come, and an encouragement to look in faith for that new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, and where the righteous shall not fail to reap their reward from that God that judgeth in the earth (2 Pet. iii. 13; Ps. lviii. 11). They do not reflect that the present system of Divine providence is necessary to the state of probation in which man is placed, and is an evidence of the marvellous loving-kindness and long-suffering of God, by reason of which neither the righteous shall have any ground for boasting, nor the wicked any ground for complaint, in the day when the secrets of all hearts shall be made manifest. If He showed kindness to His ser-

vants only, the servants would be tempted to imagine that it was for some superior merit which He saw in them; and His enemies would justify themselves on the ground that no kindness had been shown to them. But God will be clear when He judgeth (Ps. li. 4): He will leave His adversaries without excuse; and therefore He is good to all: His tender mercies are over all His works (Ps. cxlv. 9); "He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil" (Luke vi. 35). Generation after generation passes away, and still He suffers our manners in the wilderness (Acts xiii. 18), giving us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness (xiv. 17). If, then, we have the blessed witness of the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God (Rom. viii. 16); if we desire to approve ourselves as the children of the Highest; let us be followers of God, even as dear children imitate the characteristics and walk in the footsteps of their parents. Let us walk in love, treating our fellow-men as God treats them, doing good to all, and bearing long with them, if haply we may win their souls.

It must, no doubt, be admitted, as indeed it cannot be questioned, that God does not treat all men alike *in all things*. In the kingdoms of nature and providence, speaking generally, He does so; but not in the kingdom of grace. Even in this world that distinction begins which will not be fully manifested until the day of final retribution and restoration. But from all eternity the Lord knoweth them that are His; and He knows them while they are in this world, struggling against temptation, groaning under burdens of sin and sorrow, and humbly asking the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward. He knows them, and watches over them, and numbers the very hairs of their heads. With them He deals not as He deals with the children of this world.

He leads them into His inner sanctuary, often by the path of sore affliction, and enables them to see what is hidden from the wise and prudent: He makes all His goodness pass before them: He pours into their souls all the riches of His grace. Some of those whom He thus most highly distinguishes have been His bitterest enemies, blasphemers, persecutors, injurious; but His sovereign grace has heaped coals of fire upon their heads; His Holy Spirit of burning has consumed all their hardness of heart and rebellious defiance; and His enemies have been made His friends.

Here, then, is another rule for our direction. In all temporal matters we are to treat all men alike, without partiality and without hypocrisy; and in spiritual matters, too, it must be our endeavour to be followers of God, "who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. ii. 4); and who therefore commands His glorious Gospel to be preached freely and fully to every creature. It is the believer's privilege to assist, however humbly and feebly, in this work of the Lord; but at the same time he will not forget that the children of God are peculiarly his brethren, and have peculiar claims upon him. He will endeavour, according to his ability, to do good unto all men, but especially to them that are of the household of faith (Gal. vi. 10). Even as the living God is the Saviour of all men, but specially of those that believe (1 Tim. iv. 10), so the believer will love all men, even his enemies; but withal he will especially love the brotherhood. While striving honestly to fulfil the old commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," he will not forget the new commandment which Jesus gave His disciples, that as He had loved them, they also should love one another (John xiii. 34). Christ loved us so, that He laid down His life for us. "Herein,"

saith S. John, "perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us;" and the obvious inference is, that if we are to love one another as Christ loved us, "we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John iii. 16).

The second consideration by which our Lord enforces the duty of loving our neighbour, whether friend or foe, is, that as children of God, enjoined to be like Him, and to walk worthy of Him who hath called us unto His kingdom and glory (1 Thess. ii. 12), Christians are bound to aim at a higher standard of moral excellence than that of this world. To love them that love us is the common impulse of humanity: to be compassionate to unoffending wretchedness is nothing more than the prompting of natural sympathy, which frequently exists largely in the hearts of those who have no sympathies with the things of the Spirit of God. The publicans, or tax-collectors, of Judea—men usually of profligate lives, covetous, extortionate, and impure, to a degree which made them, both officially and individually, objects of extreme detestation—even the publicans, and other abandoned sinners, saluted their brethren, and did acts of kindness occasionally to others, either from ordinary compassion, or hoping, in some shape or other, to receive as much again (Luke vi. 34). The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees went as far as this. But those who are called the children of God should aim at something higher. To them the question addressed is not, Are you doing *as much* as others? but, What do ye *more than* others? The Gospel is sent to men to make them holier and happier here and hereafter, and to make them willing to labour and suffer according to the will of God. It behoves every man who assumes the name of Christ, therefore, to ask himself impartially, Am I thus labouring and enduring? The question for the

believer is not, Am I rendering unto the Lord some portion of the time, the talents, the substance which I have received from Him, and for the disposal of which I am accountable to Him? but, How much more am I doing or giving than other men, who make no profession of godliness at all; who do not propose to themselves the same ends and motives that I do, and whose spiritual privileges and opportunities have been far inferior to mine? Am I really striving *to do good unto all men*, whether they deserve it at my hands or not? Am I willing to lend, hoping for nothing again? to show kindness and liberality to those that cannot recompense me? (Luke xiv. 14.) If not, then, what is my profession of Christianity worth? What am I doing more than others?

Let us hear now the conclusion of the whole matter. "Be ye therefore perfect," saith the Divine COUNSELLOR, "even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

The word here translated "perfect"* is not ordinarily understood in a strict and absolute sense. Rigorously interpreted, it means "*complete, faultless*, lacking nothing, and coming short in no respect." But frequently in the Scriptures, as well as in our ordinary speech, the word and its cognates are used in a limited and comparative sense, and applied to what is consistent, duly proportioned in all its parts, and answering as far as possible the purpose for which it was made or done. Hence we find the term applied to men as well as to God, and a comparison between God and man thus becomes admissible. God alone is absolutely perfect. The righteousness of the man Christ Jesus is the only perfect righteousness ever manifested, or capable of being mani-

* τέλειοι.

fested, in this world. No mere man is in this life able to attain to such a righteousness as His; for the most advanced saint sins daily, in thought, word, and deed. The doctrine of "sinless perfection," if there be such a doctrine, is a vain imagination, which has no foundation in Scripture, nor any corresponding reality in Christian experience.* But there is such a thing as Christian perfection; and the Scriptures speak of it as a thing which has been attained by some, and may be attained by others. Job, for example, is called a "perfect" man, which is explained to mean, "one that feared God, and eschewed evil" (Job i. 1). Noah also is described as "a just man, and perfect in his generations"—one that "walked with God" (Gen. vi. 9.) Neither of these eminent saints was, however, sinless; nothing more can be meant than that they were, humanly speaking, consistent characters. Upon the whole, they were *single* in their aim and desire: they sought one thing; they did one thing; and though, like Paul, they had not attained to perfection in the absolute sense, like him also they

* The doctrine of CHRISTIAN PERFECTION, as expounded by Mr Wesley himself, is by no means so extravagant as the notions which have been propagated since his death by some of those who call themselves after his name. Mr Wesley does not intend that Christians ever attain to perfection so as to be free from ignorance, error, or infirmity. He expressly defines Christian perfection as "only another term for *holiness*." His words are: "They are two names for the same thing. Thus, every one that is holy is in the Scripture sense, perfect. Yet we may, lastly, observe, that neither in this respect is there any absolute perfection on earth. There is no *perfection of degrees*, as it is termed; none which does not admit of a continual increase. So that, how much soever any man hath attained, or in how high a degree soever he is perfect, he hath still need to *grow in grace*, and daily to advance in the knowledge and love of God" (Serm. xlii., i. 9). Thus explained, Christian perfection is nothing more than the doctrine of evangelical Christendom. "Entire sanctification" and "sinless perfection" are expressions unknown to Mr Wesley. They have been used ignorantly, it is to be hoped, by his disciples, who in most things have gone far beyond their master.

were pressing towards the mark, and earnestly striving after perfection.*

Our blessed Saviour's exhortation, to be perfect even as God is perfect, cannot therefore be intended to imply that Christians can ever attain to the perfection of Deity, or to the entire sinlessness of the man Christ Jesus; but it does imply that we should aim after this standard. With reference to that part of the Divine character of which our Lord had just been speaking, and which ought always to be kept in view when interpreting the exhortation, perfection, in the sense of consistency, is not unattainable. It is possible, by the help of Divine grace, to crucify all vindictive sentiments, and to cherish kindly feelings, even towards those who have injured us. God has Himself condescended to become our example in this; and has sent His Son to show us His holy and merciful law in living practice. Let that mind be in us which was also in Christ. Let us consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest we be wearied and faint in our minds (Heb. xii. 3).

"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it" (1 Thess. v. 23, 24). AMEN.

* With reference to Solomon's emphatic sentence, "There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not," Mr Wesley argues, that though this might be true under the old dispensation, it is not so under the new. But S. John saith, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." Mr Wesley quotes the same Apostle as saying, "Whosoever is born of God sinneth not;" but this is said of the Divine seed that remaineth in him, which "cannot sin, because it is born of God." It is the seed of the old Adam, which also remaineth in us, that lusteth against the Spirit, and betrays us into sin every day and hour.

# XVII.

## ALMS.

"Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.
"Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.
"But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth;
"That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly."—MATT. vi. 1–4.

F it were necessary to express in one word the sentiment with which our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount mainly designed to inspire His hearers, that word would be SINCERITY. From first to last His object evidently is to teach that it is the *motive* and *intention* which constitute the moral character of our actions; and, consequently, that it is the approbation of God, and not of man, that we ought to seek. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. xvi. 7); and thus many actions which appear commendable to men, and which, it may be, do really produce beneficial results to men, have no value or acceptability in God's sight; nay, so far from being works of righteousness, they are sinful, inasmuch as they are not done from the right motive.

In the second main division of the discourse, which has now been concluded, our Lord has exposed the per-

versions of the Moral law which had become current among the people by the traditions of the elders, and the corrupt teaching of the scribes and Pharisees, who had stripped the law of its spiritual character, restricting it to outward acts, and keeping entirely out of view that sincerity of heart which is essential to true obedience. Having thus denounced the popular errors, and expounded the true and original meaning of the law; and having taught the people that the love of our neighbour, in its most comprehensive sense, is the fulfilling of the law,—our Lord proceeds, in the third main division of the discourse, on which we are now entering, to speak of the whole subject of human duty, as comprehended under the four heads, of alms, prayer, fasting, and secular concerns. The general scope of this part of the Sermon is sufficiently indicated by our Lord Himself in the words, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these (temporal) things shall be added unto you" (ver. 33). And it would appear that the order in which the several branches of duty are considered is not without a purpose, namely, to show the relative importance of *spiritual* and *secular* concernments. The care of their bodies and of their worldly estate is that on which the mass of mankind bestow the largest amount of thought and energy; but in our Lord's classification it will be observed that "the flesh" and "the treasure" hold the last place. And even with respect to spiritual duties, the order of precedence observed by our Lord is not without significance. Fasting, or the humbling of the soul and body on account of sin, and for the special and direct benefit of ourselves individually, is considered last in order: alms, which has respect to the special and direct benefit of others, holds the first place; and prayer, which contemplates the benefit both of ourselves and others, stands in the

midst. Surely this arrangement is intended to teach us that "it is more blessed to give than to receive;" that we should be more solicitous to do good to others than to obtain benefits for ourselves; nay, that the best way to secure blessings, temporal and spiritual, for ourselves, is to labour to impart blessings to those around us.

Under the general heads of alms, prayer, and fasting, are comprehended all our spiritual duties. To fulfil these duties is to live righteously, godly, and soberly in this present world: it is to serve God with our property, with our souls, and with our bodies. The subject of ALMS first claims our attention; and it will be necessary to consider the duty enjoined, and the manner in which it is to be performed.

The English word "alms" is derived from a Greek word signifying *pity, mercy, compassion*, and, in a secondary sense, *the actions which flow from those sentiments.* The word translated "merciful" in the Fifth Beatitude is from the same root.* Strictly speaking, therefore, "alms" includes not merely the giving material relief to the poor and needy, which is the popular acceptation of the term, but all deeds done for the welfare of others, whether temporal or spiritual, from merciful and benevolent motives. The time, the labour, as well as the money, which a Christian devotes to evangelistic operations at home and abroad, are really "alms" as much as the bread and the blankets which he distributes among the hungry and naked. It is the *motive* which distinguishes alms-deeds from other deeds. Whatever we do for the benefit of either the souls or the bodies of our fellow-men, if done for the love of Christ, and in acknowledgment of the abundant mercy of God towards ourselves, is "alms;" but the admixture of any carnal or worldly motive destroys the eleemosynary

* ἔλεος, *pity*; ἐλεήμων, *pitiful, merciful*; ἐλεημοσύνη, *pity, alms.*

character of the action. Our Lord, it must also be observed, does not speak of *giving* alms, but of *doing alms;* from which it is clear that *giving*, in the ordinary sense, is not all that is contemplated, but that all works of charity are included.

It is worthy of remark that in many ancient manuscripts we find the word usually rendered "righteousness," used in the *first* verse of the chapter, instead of that rendered "alms;" and the word "righteousness" has been inserted by our translators in the margin, as an indication that this reading has high authority.* Whatever reading be adopted, the sense is substantially the same; for it is a fundamental truth, which many find it very difficult to apprehend, that works of *mercy* are really works of *righteousness* also. In the kingdom of grace, righteousness and mercy are exhibited in consistent association: one attribute of the Deity is not magnified at the expense of another; but the whole make together a sublime harmony, which is the perfection of the Godhead. Our Lord had exhorted His hearers to be perfect, even as God is perfect: to imitate the character and mode of the Divine perfections, even

* Beza and Griesbach prefer δικαιοσύνην. Scholz retains ἐλεημοσύνην, which has a preponderance of the best MS. authority. Dean Alford has edited δικαιοσύνην, and expresses his conviction that the received text, which has ἐλεημοσύνην, is a mistaken gloss, which has crept into the text in consequence of the transcribers not having perceived that the caution in ver. 1 was of a general character, applicable to all deeds of righteousness, and not to alms only. Bloomfield, however, gives good reasons in support of the received text. May the suggestion be hazarded, that δικαιοσύνην has more the appearance of a gloss than ἐλεημοσύνην? The earliest copyists of the New Testament MSS. were chiefly Jews, familiar with the Rabbinical writings, in which צְדָקָה, signifying in pure Hebrew "righteousness," is frequently used to signify "alms-deeds," for which there is no precise equivalent in the Hebrew language. The Jews were taught to consider alms-deeds not as deeds of generosity, but as works of righteousness or justice. (See Art. "Alms," in *Kitto's Cycl. Bibl. Lit., Alexander's Edition.*)

though we cannot attain to absolute perfection. And there is no mode of illustrating the Divine perfections so obviously within our reach as this of combining righteousness with mercy; on the one hand, doing justice with pity in our hearts, and on the other, doing alms, or works of mercy, as being really works of righteousness—as deeds of justice, to which we are truly bound by the law of love, that best interpreter of the rights of man.

Let us consider the doing of alms from the temporal point of view. It is by no means unreasonable to ask, Why should alms be necessary at all? or, in other words, Why have not all men a sufficiency, at least for their temporal wants? And it is no answer to this question to say, that such is, and always has been, *the fact.* That there are poor and needy everywhere cannot be questioned; but why is it so? Why should there not be a community of goods? And this question is not to be dismissed lightly, as if it suggested a mere absurdity. A community of goods is precisely what we look for in the kingdom of God, for the coming of which we pray daily. As Christians, we long for the time when worldly distinctions of rank and property shall be no more, and the whole earth shall be the common inheritance of the children of God.

The heathen mythologies of antiquity tell us of a "golden age," in which the earth brought forth her fruits spontaneously, and mankind lived without any distinction of property, without commerce, and without war. The fable is most probably a corrupt tradition of the life of our first parents in Eden; but it is valuable as a corroboration of the sacred history, as well as of the doctrine of man's original innocence and subsequent corruption. The fable recognizes the distinction of

property as the result of sin; and there can be no doubt that it really is so. Labour is the parent of property; and the Word of God expressly informs us that labour—not the pleasant recreative exercise which was requisite to dress and keep the garden of Eden, but toilsome labour—is part of that penal evil which flowed from the original sin. As all men, therefore, had not the same strength, the same skill, the same industry, the same powers of endurance, or the same intellectual discernment to direct their other faculties, it followed inevitably that the labour of some men was more productive than that of others, and that some men became richer and more powerful than others. And without dwelling on these elementary principles of political economy, suffice it to say, that as labour is God's ordinance, so property is God's ordinance, being formally proclaimed in the law, "Thou shalt not covet anything that is thy neighbour's." And it may further be concluded, that since God has given to men different natural powers, and established different social relationships, poverty itself is an appointment of God, being the inevitable result of those laws which God has established for the providential government of the world.

If, then, poverty exist in the world by God's ordinance, we may be sure that it exists for wise and holy ends. The desire for competency, if not for wealth, is a necessary stimulus to industry; and the degree of uncertainty and instability which attends the acquisition and possession of wealth and station, keeps alive that spirit of enterprise, which is the source of both national and individual prosperity. Every man fears poverty, and hopes to rise in the social scale: manufactures and commerce are simply the practical development of these hopes and fears. The business of this world is thus a

race, in which, constituted as we are, compassed with infirmities, and having evil passions and propensities within us, too often wholly uncurbed by religious principles, it must of necessity happen that some will be overmatched and distanced in the course, and that others will utterly break down. In so far as this want of success in life is the result of indolence, or vice, or bad training, poverty thus becomes a most salutary warning. Much poverty may be prevented by caution, patience, perseverance, with strict frugality, in our walk and habits of life. But, at the same time, there is much poverty which is brought about, not by the improvidence of the poor themselves, but by events in the providence of God, which could neither be foreseen nor prevented. Thus we may feel assured that while the world remaineth,—while fires burn, tempests blow, and rivers are swollen with floods,—while war, pestilence, and famine do each its appointed work—there will always be poverty. God Himself hath said, "The poor shall never cease out of the land" (Deut. xv. 11); and He Himself puts in operation the causes which combine to produce poverty.

The continual existence of poverty is the single and sufficient reason for the necessity of alms. The evil is not to be remedied by a division of property, or by proclaiming a community of goods. The Utopia of the Socialist and Communist, even if it were established, could not endure, unless the nature of man were entirely changed. We do indeed look for "a good time coming," a real establishment of heaven upon earth, when disease and pain and sorrow and sighing shall have fled away for ever, and every man's cup shall be filled to overflowing from the fountain of eternal love and joy. But "until HE come whose right it is" (Ezek. xxi. 27), and unto whom all power is given both in heaven and

in earth, there will always be poverty in this evil world. There will always be a proportion of mankind in circumstances of destitution and distress, while others have a superfluity. And it is the dictate of sound political economy, not less than of Christian charity, that they who have abundance should relieve the necessities of the needy. They that are destitute are, in that condition, useless members of society, and the community loses the wealth which might be derived from their services. Sound economy utilizes everything, as far as possible, and suffers no waste or unnecessary expenditure. It is true utilitarian policy, accordingly, to heal the sick, if for no better reason than that they may become capable of labour. It is wise to succour the poor man and teach him effectually to provide for himself, that instead of being merely a consumer and a down-draught, he may become a producer and contribute his quota to the common good. And the same reasoning may be extended to alms-doing of every kind, whether the object be the physical, the intellectual, the moral, or the spiritual advancement of mankind. Poverty is always a temptation to crime; and when combined, as it too frequently is, with ignorance and irreligion, the temptation is irresistible; for the mere fear of punishment has, in the absence of virtuous principles and self-respect, a very slender influence in restraining the passions and appetites of men. It is manifestly opposed to the interests of any community, even in the mere temporal view of the matter, to suffer poverty to remain unrelieved, or to permit any part of the population to continue without "the benefits of knowledge and the blessings of religion."

An important question is here suggested. If it be granted that poverty is an inevitable fact, and that it is a political as well as a religious duty to relieve it, how

much of this duty should be undertaken by the community, and how much should be left to individual benevolence? This question, it will be perceived, opens up the whole controversy concerning poor-laws, and also the more important controversy concerning public religious and educational establishments. In so far as these questions belong to social economics, it would appear that the answer to them all is contained in the simple proposition, that *Evils which injuriously affect the whole community should be guarded against, or remedied, at the public cost*, or by public statutory provision. If the public honour be insulted or the public liberty menaced by a foreign power, there is never any hesitation. The public sword leaps from its scabbard; the public guns belch forth thunder and smoke; and enormous sums of public money are lavished, often with reckless improvidence. The defence of our country against foreign aggression is admitted by statesmen of every school to be a matter of public concernment. The public enemy, it is most justly felt, must be opposed at the public cost. And yet we habitually tolerate the presence among us of public enemies far more deadly than any foreign invader. Ignorance, vice, pauperism, are public enemies, which eat into the very vitals of the community, and cause a waste far more debilitating to the body politic than the most costly war. It is now beginning to be understood that if these public enemies are to be effectually opposed, they must be opposed at the public cost. The relief of the strictly destitute, whether in health or sickness, and the providing of a sound education for every child in the community, are properly the concern of the State, for these are the swords and guns wherewith the public enemy is to be opposed. With respect to public education, there can be no doubt that, under judicious regulations, every pound expended in provid-

ing cheap or gratuitous education for the masses, would be repaid a hundredfold, not only in the prevention of crime and the consequent reduction of our judicial and penal establishments, but in the positive accession of so many useful and orderly members to the community. In the same way, pauper hospitals and asylums are clearly a matter for the public government to deal with, for the relief of the sick and indigent is a matter that affects the whole commonwealth. No citizen ought to be at liberty to refuse payment of an equitable rate for this purpose, any more than he is permitted to refuse payment of other duties or taxes levied for the necessities of the State. The test of actual experience has shown that private benevolence is altogether inadequate to meet the extent of the evil. The real burden falls upon a few charitable individuals, by no means of the most wealthy classes; while the majority of the people, either from ignorance, from caprice, or from worse motives, withhold their alms, which ought not to be regarded as alms, but rather as a just payment to meet a public exigency.

If it should be thought that undue prominence has been assigned to the mere political features of this subject, the reason has been, that it seemed of some importance to show that the doing of alms is enjoined upon us by considerations of public economy, as well as by the precepts of religion. It is not meant that *all* charity should be regarded as a public concern; but rather that Christian benevolence should be left unembarrassed in its proper sphere, by dividing among the whole community the burden of those prophylactic and sanitary measures which are necessary for the prevention and correction of ignorance, vice, and pauperism, as declared public enemies. When this has been thoroughly and equitably adjusted, there will still remain a

wide field for the doing of alms, according to the means and opportunities of private Christians, who are presumed to be actuated, not by economical motives alone, but by the constraining love of Christ.

It will be observed that our Lord does not in direct terms enjoin His hearers to do alms, but rather assumes that they already recognized the obligation, and habitually fulfilled it. He does not, therefore, remind them of the many precepts contained in the Law and the Prophets on this subject, presuming that they knew it to be their duty to open wide their hands unto their brethren, the poor and the needy, in the land. In like manner, it ought not to be necessary, in a Christian country, to urge the professing followers of Christ to deeds of alms, to which they ought to be sufficiently impelled by religious principle, without the aid of argument or declamation. The distresses of fallen humanity afford, no doubt, an ample field for the inquiries of social science, as well as for the eloquence of the Christian philanthropist; but the true follower of Jesus needs not such stimulants to excite him to liberality. And on the other hand, the man given to covetousness is convinced by no demonstration, and is deaf to every appeal. He does, indeed, sometimes give, but the gifts of such a man are not alms, not a sacrifice acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Abstaining, therefore, from any attempt to demonstrate the Christian duty of doing alms, let it suffice to suggest one thought for the correction of a mistake to which the truly benevolent are sometimes prone. They are tempted to withhold their help from the needy, by the consideration that, in too many cases, the poverty and distress which are the most clamant for relief are the consequence of culpable improvidence, and not unfrequently of gross vice. That such is the fact cannot

be questioned ; and it is a matter for the consideration of civil governments, whether those vices which engender poverty, disease, insanity, and crime might not be made to pay the oppressive taxes which they impose on the industry of communities.* But waiving such considerations for the present, and looking at the matter from a higher stand-point, if the demerit of the individual be held a sufficient reason for closing our hearts and hands against the cry of actual suffering and want, the effect would be to banish all mercy and charity from the world. If only the deserving are to be relieved, where are they to be found? There is not a man upon the earth that *deserves* anything but evil ; and we all deserve more evil than we can receive in this life. It is of the very essence of mercy, or alms, that it is bestowed on an undeserving object : if it be deserved, it is not alms, but payment.

Let it be granted that the majority of the inmates of our gaols, hospitals, and asylums, and of our poor generally, have brought their sufferings on themselves by their own misconduct, and that they deserve no pity or relief. Are they, therefore, not to be pitied or relieved? Is it thus that God has dealt with our erring race? Did HE look upon the race of Adam, naked and wounded, and ready to perish, and did HE say, "They deserve it all : let them die"? Or was He moved with compassion for our ruined and helpless condition? Did He not visit us where we lay, and raise us from the dust,

* For example : at least seven-tenths of the pauperism, insanity, and crime which afflict the civilized world are caused by intemperance. Is it not equitable, then, that the traffic in intoxicating liquors should be made to pay for the miseries it produces? What right has any man to reduce himself by drunkenness to the condition of a diseased or lunatic pauper, and then claim support from the sober and industrious? Let those who have made a gain by ministering to his vices carry the burden they have created.

pouring in oil and wine, and clothing us with spotless raiment, that we might be meet guests for the mansions of a better and an enduring inheritance? Go, then, and do likewise. "Be ye followers of God, as dear children" (Eph. v. 1). Go and succour, not the virtuous and reputable poor alone, whom "unmerciful disaster," and not dissipation, has brought to the hospital pallet and the pauper's dole; but go to the abodes of misery and destitution: find out the victim of his own unbridled lusts—the wretch who, in the tortures he endures, is receiving only an instalment of the wages for which he has been drudging all his life—go, and think in thine heart, "Such might I also have been, but for the grace of God, which has brought mercy to my soul! As God, therefore, has been merciful to me, a sinner, so will I also show mercy to this my sinful brother!"

Our Lord's precepts in the passage before us are directed, not to the duty of alms-doing in itself, but rather to the manner in which that duty ought to be done. It has been generally supposed that in the words, "Do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do," &c., He referred to an actual custom of the Pharisees, who, it has been said, were wont to cause a trumpet to be sounded when they intended to do alms, ostensibly for the purpose of assembling the poor, but in reality to attract public attention to themselves. There is, however, no historical evidence that any such custom prevailed; and, indeed, the ostentatiousness implied in the literal sounding of a trumpet is so gross as to be scarcely credible, even of Pharisees. The expression was proverbial, traces of it being found even in heathen writers. It arose from the universal custom of making proclamations by sound of trumpet. Hence the public proclaiming of anything is figuratively

called "blowing a trumpet." The scribes and Pharisees in our Lord's day were for the most part men of the most sordid dispositions, and their religion was too generally a mere cloak for covetousness. When they did alms, they took care to blazon their benefactions, that they might have glory of men. They loved to give their donations in public; in the synagogues, where collections were ordinarily made, and at the corners of the streets, where beggars came together to solicit alms. Whatever they did, they did to be seen of men. That was the reward they sought, and that reward they had and no other. The approbation of conscience, or the final acceptance of God, were rewards of no value in their eyes.

Is it necessary, in this age of progress, to exort professing Christians that when they do alms they must not do it with sound of trumpet? This question may be answered by another: "If the trumpet were *not* sounded, how much alms would really be done? If, for example, the subscription lists of our religious and benevolent institutions were not regularly published, and our charity proclaimed in synagogues, and placarded at the corners of streets, what would be the amount realized? Those who have taken an active part in the management of public charities well know the answer that must be returned; and they know also the difficulty of obtaining, from private benevolence only, the funds necessary for maintaining such institutions in a state of efficiency. In fact, such is, to a large extent, the perverted state of public sentiment, that it is scarcely possible to obtain money for any work of piety or mercy—whether it be the building of a church, the maintenance of a mission, the support of an hospital or infirmary, or the relief of persons who have been ruined by some exceptional and unforeseen calamity

—without ostentatious publicity. Is it not a just cause of complaint that while many professed disciples of Christ give willingly and largely when the gift is to bring some credit to themselves, they do not give so willingly or so largely when their gifts are unknown? Is not secret charity comparatively rare—the left hand being in most cases fully cognizant of the doings of the right? And is it not well known that the most effectual way of raising money is to do it with blare of trumpet and tuck of drum? In some form or other men require to be bribed into giving; and whatever form the bribe assumes, the gifts so obtained are not charity, but "sounding brass and tinkling cymbal." If a remonstrance be hazarded—if it be hinted that this trumpeting of alms is opposed to true Christian charity, and savours too much of this world, the feeble whisper is immediately silenced by such painfully significant remarks as, "We cannot help it: what other course can we adopt? We find it impossible to obtain the funds necessary for the maintenance of our operations without creating a public excitement of some kind." It must be admitted that such considerations are not without some show of reason, and it is no doubt difficult to disregard them in a time of severe pecuniary pressure, and when ordinary appeals have failed; but looking at the subject from the ground of Christian principle, may it not be asked, "Is such reasoning worthy of those who profess obedience to the law of Christ, and acknowledge the love of Christ as their most constraining motive? Is it not plain that what is contributed in this ostentatious way is not *alms*, but the price paid for the excitement—the bazaar, the banquet, the music, the banners, the speeches, the praise of men?"

In opposition to all this carnal self-indulging display,

miscalled charity, our Lord teaches us, "When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret." We are not forbidden in every case to do alms in the presence of others; for this frequently is unavoidable. The command here is not to be interpreted in a manner inconsistent with that other, "Let your light so shine before men, that, seeing your good works, they may glorify your Father which is in heaven." Our Lord does not merely say, "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men," but adds, "to be seen of them;" meaning clearly that we must not do any works of righteousness *with the object* of being seen of men, and obtaining their applause. We are enjoined to take heed that our motives are pure, and that whatever good works we do, we do, not that they may be seen by men, but from love to God and man. The love of praise is a dangerous snare, into which we are frequently betrayed, both by the deceitfulness of our own hearts and by the pernicious customs of this world, which have been so extensively naturalized in the Church of God. Let us beware, then, of everything that savours of ostentation. And to this end, let us cherish in our hearts a very humble estimate of anything we do for Christ, remembering that when we have done all that is commanded us we are unprofitable servants—we have simply done what it was our bounden duty to do (Luke xvii. 10). Before we can feel ourselves entitled to praise, we must have done something that we were not bound to do, as servants of Christ. Let every mouth be stopped. "Let us remember our sins," says good old Matthew Henry, "that we may mourn over them; let us forget our good deeds, lest we should be exalted above measure." In the day of judgment, we are told, when all nations shall be

gathered before the throne of the Son of man, the righteous will have forgotten that they had ever ministered to their Lord when He was hungry, or thirsty, or naked, or sick, or in prison, but the righteous Judge will not forget these works of faith and labours of love; He will acknowledge all such alms-deeds done for the least of His brethren as though they had been done personally to Himself, and will reward them openly in the face of the assembled universe (Matt. xxv. 31, &c.)

It is not unlawful for the believer to have respect unto the future recompense of reward. We can, indeed, merit nothing at God's hands; but He will honour His own work in us and by us. It is Christ that has earned the reward, and who alone merits it; but it is His will that they whom He by His Spirit enables to serve Him faithfully shall be with Him where He is, and behold and share His glory. We have His own promise, that whosoever shall give a cup of cold water in His name shall in nowise lose his reward (Mark ix. 41).

Let us do alms, therefore, to the poor and needy, as God shall prosper us, and as He provides opportunity. Let us watch and seek for such opportunities, after the example of Him who came both to seek and to save, and "who went about doing good." Let our gifts at all times be the free-will offerings of our hearts, yielded not grudgingly, or because we are importunately solicited, but with a ready mind, for "God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. ix. 7). Shall Christ come begging to our doors, as He does when famishing souls and suffering bodies cry for succour, and be sent empty away? Nay, verily, for all that we have is His. Let us give in a spirit of self-denial and sacrifice, not what we can well spare, but what it costs us something to give (2 Sam. xxiv. 24); re-

garding our largest gifts as all too inconsiderable to show our love to Him who first loved us, and hath crowned us with loving-kindness and tender mercy. Such sacrifices are an odour of a sweet smell unto God, and prove that true Christian charity is something more than a flourish of trumpets.

## XVIII.

## PRAYER.

"And when thou prayest."—MATT. vi. 5.

THE second branch of human duty to which our Lord invites our attention, is PRAYER—a subject of great importance and extent, and which it will be necessary to consider somewhat fully; for probably there are few subjects on which professing Christians generally are more in need of instruction.* Not only is the duty in many cases either wholly omitted, or very carelessly performed, but there is reason to fear that many, even of those who make some attempt to fulfil the duty, do it ineffectually: they ask, and receive not, because they ask amiss (Jam. iv. 3). In the present sifting times of the Church Catholic, there is an evident necessity for special, fervent, and continued prayer; for there has never been a time in which the adversaries of Divine truth have come forth in greater force, or in which more serious dangers have threatened the peace of Jerusalem.

It may be observed here, as with regard to alms-doing, that our Lord gives no express command; there is not,

* The substance of these chapters on prayer was published a few years ago in a series of papers contributed to a periodical in the colony of New South Wales.

indeed, in the whole Word of God, any positive and direct command to pray. Our Lord takes it for granted that all men professing to believe in a God both do alms and pray; and His instructions are directed entirely to the manner in which these duties should be performed. This absence of direct precept is itself the strongest precept; for we are thus taught that these obligations are involved in the most elementary conceptions of religion, that they admit of no question, and need no injunction. This is especially true with respect to prayer. Man is a religious being. It is a deep necessity of his constitution that he must worship *somewhat;* and it is a fact, notwithstanding the assertions of some ethnological writers, who have attended chiefly to the physical characteristics of different tribes, that all men, the most degraded savages not excepted, do worship somewhat. From the heavenly bodies and the souls of heroes, down to four-footed beasts, birds, fishes, reptiles, flies, and dung, every conceivable object in the natural world has been supposed to be the "habitat" of some divinity, and has been made the idol of some nation or family of men. Every man, indeed, has his own idol, for every man naturally worships that which he supremely loves and venerates. He may call it an Emperor, a Czar, or a Grand Lama: he may call it family, or genius, or power, or pomp, or place among men: it may be money, or fashion, or pleasure, or meat and drink. Idolatry is the deeply-rooted sin of fallen humanity: whatever occupies the highest place in any man's affections, and is regarded by him as his chief end—that is his idol—that is the god he worships. The idol which every man naturally worships is self; for the chief end of the natural man is the gratification and glorification of self. Even those hideous superstitions known as *devil-worship*, which consist in propitiatory offerings to malignant

spirits, and which are by no means confined to the lowest types of humanity, are all resolvable into the worship of self, and that in its most revolting and degrading form. Fear is, of all motives for worship, the most ignoble; and yet it may be questioned whether the more prevalent motive, which induces men to worship for the sake of what they expect to obtain, is really of a much more elevated character.

The Christian religion, then, does not address men as atheists, and command them to worship a god. It finds them already worshipping every man his own god; and bids them forsake these vanities, and worship the living and the true God, who made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all things that are therein (Acts xiv. 15). Revelation was not necessary to teach men that there is a God: nature teaches every man that much. Revelation was designed to draw men away from the worship of creature-gods, and to make them worshippers of the Creator according to His own laws and ordinances.

"Hear, O Israel; JEHOVAH our God is one JEHOVAH" (Deut. vi. 4).

"Thou shalt fear (*venerate, adore*) JEHOVAH thy God, and serve (*worship*) Him, and shalt swear by His name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you" (Deut. vi. 13, 14).

"God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John iv. 24).

"There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim. ii. 5, 6).

These are statutes of the everlasting God, the Almighty Father, the maker of all things visible and invisible. He does not command men to worship, for He has so constituted them that they cannot but worship; but He tells them that He alone must be the object of their

worship, and His laws their only rule of duty. He teaches them that He is a pure Spirit, having no bodily parts or passions; and, consequently, that no material substance whatever can be a similitude of Him, but that He must be worshipped in spirit and in truth, without material representations, and with integrity, sincerity, and entire submission of heart. Further, He teaches them that man, being a sinner, and the enemy of God by wicked works, cannot approach the high and holy God directly, but only through a mediator; and that there is but one Mediator whom He hath Himself appointed, the man Christ Jesus, the only-begotten Son of God, who hath by His perfect obedience and expiatory sufferings reconciled sinners to God, and through whom alone we have access to the throne of the heavenly grace.

The distinction of the Christian, therefore, is not that he worships, but that he worships the true God, in the spirit, through Christ the Mediator. And it ought not to be necessary to urge upon professing Christians that it is their duty to pray, for this duty is implied in the very name of Christian. Unhappily, however, there is so large an amount of mere nominal profession in the Christian Church; and there are so many who either never really pray at all, or pray in a carnal spirit, or without recognition of the Mediator,—that it is necessary to recur from time to time to the elements of religious knowledge, and expound the first principles of the oracles of God. There is every reason to believe that a considerable number of professing Christians either wholly neglect prayer, or do not pray in an acceptable manner. Does this allegation seem harsh and uncharitable? Professing Christians frequently acknowledge, without much apparent compunction, that so it is; but the negligence is abundantly and painfully evident, even

if it were not acknowledged. If a field is observed to be overgrown with burrs and thistles, and to yield little or no crop for man or beast, it needs not his own confession to convict the husbandman of sloth; and with equal certainty may it be predicated, that the man whose life exhibits few or none of the fruits of the Spirit does not pray. "Ye have not, because ye ask not" (Jam. iv. 2).

At the risk, therefore, of entering upon ground already occupied by some of our ablest divines, it is felt to be necessary, before considering those points specially mentioned by our Lord, to offer some remarks on the nature and duty of prayer, on the conditions of effectual prayer, and on the hindrances to it.

WHAT IS PRAYER?

This may seem a very rudimentary question, and so in truth it is. The majority of professing Christians probably know, theoretically and formally, what prayer is. The question is, notwithstanding, proposed with all solemnity, because many things not essential to prayer are frequently mistaken for it, while those things which are essential are frequently pretermitted, or regarded as of minor importance.

Many people, for example, imagine they are praying, when they are only *saying prayers*. This is one of the disadvantages attending the use of forms of prayer: there is a temptation to rest satisfied with the form, and to mistake that for prayer. This danger is not, indeed, inseparable from forms of prayer: if it were so, the use of such forms in any circumstances would be indefensible. On the other hand, by rejecting forms, we do not altogether avoid the danger of formality. It is quite possible to "say prayers" without a prescribed form of words. Our minds may become formalized, as well as

our language; and our thoughts may become habituated to running in a particular groove, which naturally leads to a reiteration of the same, or nearly the same words. It is quite possible to pray with the spirit and with the understanding also, through the medium of a liturgy; and it is quite possible for those to "say prayers" who pride themselves on their independence of forms, and deride a liturgy as "an ill-said mass." The root of all formality is in the heart; and if the heart be far from God, it is of no avail to draw near unto Him with the lip, whether our phraseology be extemporaneous or pre-composed. Such utterances are not prayer.

Others imagine they are praying when they merely *assume the usual posture of devotion*, and listen to a prayer offered by a minister. Frequently they do not even listen; or if they compel their attention during a few sentences, they are unable to sustain it, and failing to apprehend the purport of the petitions, they cannot and do not offer them as their own. For this cause so many prayers ascend from the minister only, or with a very feeble echo from the hearts of the congregation. Even believers sometimes confess, with shame and sorrow, that though they can follow a discourse without much wandering, they are not able to command their attention to the same extent during prayer. The reason of this is, that the enemy of souls is more solicitous to hinder prayer than he is to hinder preaching. Satan recks not that men hear the Word Sabbath after Sabbath, and even find pleasure in hearing it, provided they will be satisfied with hearing, without attempting to lay it up in their hearts, or practise it in their lives. So long as men only hear the Word, and are not doers of the work, Satan's kingdom is not weakened by preaching, but rather strengthened; whereas, when the hearer receives the Word with diligence, preparation, and prayer, Satan

trembles, for he cannot then carry off the seed; on the contrary, it takes root and flourishes, for the strength in the worshipper's heart is no longer his own, but God's; and the strong man armed, whose goods were at peace while he kept undisturbed possession of his palace, is now evicted and quelled by one stronger than he.

An error of an opposite kind is the notion that *prayer consists in highly excited feelings, or in vehement speaking or gestures.* Some Christian sects are peculiarly distinguished by the very demonstrative character of their devotional exercises; and God forbid that their exuberant vehemence should be sweepingly condemned as if it must of necessity be insincere and delusive. So far from this, it is very often, and especially in times of revival, the natural and irrepressible utterance of genuine emotions. It cannot, however, be considered a healthful sign, if this spasmodic violence continue, and become the normal condition of the worshipper. The fruit of the Spirit is peace. "The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever" (Isa. xxxii. 17). The commencement of the Christian course is often like a brook, noisy and babbling; but if the work of grace be genuine, the noise will be subdued, and the believer's progress in the Divine life will rather resemble the brook when it has become a river, deep and broad, gliding peacefully, with rich freights on its mighty bosom, towards the boundless and fathomless ocean.

What, then, is prayer?

There is no better definition of it than that contained in James Montgomery's well-known lines:—

> "Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
> Utter'd, or unexpress'd:
> The motion of a hidden fire
> That trembles in the breast."

The one grand essential thing in prayer is, that it be *the sincere desire of the heart going forth towards God.* The utterance of the desire in words is not essential: the most fervent prayers are frequently "groanings which cannot be uttered." The pious Hannah prayed in her heart: "only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard" (1 Sam. i. 13). The Saviour prayed "with strong crying and tears:" in His agony "He prayed more earnestly;" and the words He used were great drops of blood.

Prayer does not, however, consist exclusively of petitions. Praise and adoration are usually associated with the utterance of our desires; and confession and thanksgiving ought not to be omitted; for these, though apparently distinct from prayer, are really implied in it. To ask for something is in itself a confession of want. To ask for pardon is an acknowledgment of guilt, as certainly as to ask for food is an acknowledgment of hunger. Hence, in our stated prayers it is usual to confess our sins, our unworthiness, and our necessities, before presenting specific petitions for pardon and supply. Thanksgiving is also a necessary part of prayer. It is one chief argument in pleading with God. We bless His great and glorious name for all the goodness He hath shown unto us, both temporal and spiritual, and especially in giving His only-begotten Son to die for us; and because He hath thus proved His love towards us, we are emboldened to ask, in the terms of His promise, that with His Son He will also freely give us all things that He seeth to be needful for us. Christian prayer is not the blind craving of the natural heart, like the roar of the young lion when it lacks food. It is the earnest intelligent supplication of a moral agent, directed by the precepts of Him to whom it is addressed, and who has encouraged the poor and needy

to approach Him in the appointed way. It is His own gracious promise: "They that seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing" (Ps. xxxiv. 10).

Having thus endeavoured to answer the question, What is prayer? we may now briefly consider the duty of prayer.

Our blessed Lord, as has already been observed, does not positively command us to pray; but taking for granted that the duty was acknowledged by all that heard Him, He directs them as to the spirit and manner in which the duty should be performed. He does not say, "Pray ye;" but, "After this manner pray ye;" "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet." "Pray to thy Father which is in secret," and so forth. At another time He spake a parable to this end, "That men ought always to pray, and not to faint;" and another for the special instruction of those "that trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others" (Luke xviii. 1–14). In like manner, the Apostles give no direct injunction to pray, but rather such exhortations as these —"Pray without ceasing;" "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God;" "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving;" "Pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands;" "Pray one for another." And, not to multiply quotations, the whole spirit of the New Testament seems to regard prayer as so essential an element of the Christian character, that to say of a man, "Behold, he prayeth," is equivalent to an intimation that he is a believing, regenerated, and justified child of God.

Nevertheless, if professing Christians were to be examined according to the definition which has been given of prayer—that is to say, if they were individually

to be asked, whether their prayers were the sincere desires of their hearts going forth towards God, and whether they were always accompanied with humble and heartfelt confession of sin, and thankful acknowledgment of the unmerited mercies they have received—is there not reason to fear that comparatively few would be found of whom it could with truth be said, "Behold, they pray?" Would not such an examination demonstrate that many do not really pray to the God in whom they profess to believe, but, like the heathen, go after other gods, or, like the semi-pagan Samaritans, worship they know not what? And of those who do pray to God, would it not be found that many pray in such a manner that their prayers are not acceptable, and consequently not effectual?

For the present, let us confine our attention to those who, to a great extent, if not altogether, neglect the duty of prayer—a much larger number than is generally supposed.

The arguments which the evil heart of unbelief has raised, in opposition to the dictates of conscience and the authoritative teaching of God's Word, are chiefly these two: first, That prayer involves a philosophical absurdity; and secondly, That, even if not absurd, it is unnecessary.

First, It is alleged that prayer involves a philosophical absurdity—that it does not and cannot accomplish the end proposed. "Such," says the Duke of Argyll, "is the conclusion to which the language of some scientific men is evidently pointing; that great general laws inexorable in their operation, and causes in endless chain of invariable sequence, are the governing powers in nature, and that they leave no room for any special direction or providential ordering of events. If this be true, it is vain to deny its bearing on religion. What, then, can be the use of prayer? Can laws hear us?

Can they change, or can they suspend, themselves? These questions cannot but arise, and they require an answer." * In theological language, the argument may be thus stated: *The course of events is fixed by God's immutable and eternal decree, and prayer cannot alter it.* The argument is by no means new, though the recent demonstrations of physical science in its various departments have, it has been said, added a force to it which had not been previously felt. The argument is in itself, however, little more than the old heathen doctrine of fate or necessity. In the ancient mythologies, fate is represented as a power superior to the highest gods. It was believed that events were fixed by inevitable necessity; and the Stoics taught that the highest virtue consisted in submission to what could not be prevented. The Mussulman doctrine of destiny is substantially the same, and rationalistic writers persist in confounding the scriptural doctrine of Divine providence with this old fatalism. With the exception of the Arminian heresy, which is little better than a reproduction, in a Christian costume, of the philosophy of Epicurus,† the Christian Church holds that God, the All-wise, Unchangeable, and Sovereign Jehovah, has, for His own glory, absolutely foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. It is a truth which cannot be questioned or evaded, that the course of events is immutably determined and foreknown by the eternal God, the Father of lights, in whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. The work of Divine providence is nothing more than the develop-

* "Reign of Law," third edition, p. 58.

† Epicurus, though professing to acknowledge the gods, and recommending piety and reverence towards them, denied that they had any concern in human affairs. This was not, of course, the doctrine of Arminius; nevertheless, it is a plain logical conclusion from a denial of the doctrine of the Divine sovereignty, which is the basis of the Arminian system.

ment of God's eternal purposes. It is thus that God governs the world. But between the providential government of the true God, and the blind mechanical necessity of fatalism, there is a vast difference. Men are not machines, but moral and responsible agents, and as such God deals with them. He makes them, no doubt, as He makes the higher spiritual intelligences, the instruments of His will; He makes them, of their own accord, do those things which His hand and His counsel had determined before to be done (Acts iv. 28). And the question is, Whether prayer is inconsistent with the immutability of God's purposes? If it be so, then it is, of course, absurd to pray.

So powerfully has this philosophical difficulty affected the minds of some modern theologians, that they have actually surrendered the position, that prayer is really a power prevailing with God, and recommend it only as a salutary spiritual exercise. But this, as the Duke of Argyll truly observes, is "as bad science, as it is bad religion." Spiritual exercises are salutary, only as they are instrumental in effecting some beneficial change in a man's mind or character, which, it is acknowledged, must, ultimately and potentially, proceed from a Divine source. The laws of nature include the laws of mind as well as the laws of matter; and if the dominion of law "be really incompatible with the agency of volition, human or divine, then the mind is as inaccessible to that agency as material things."* The truth is, however, that the conclusion which the superficial and deceitful reason of man draws from the immutability of God's purposes is opposed to both Scripture and experience. The prayers of the humble and contrite spirit are not opposed to the purposes of God, but are themselves included in those purposes, and in strict harmony

* "Reign of Law," p. 61.

with them. God works by means: and one very important means by which He works is the prayers of His people. "Prayer does not require us to believe that anything can be done without the use of means; neither does it require us to believe that anything will be done in violation of the universal order."*

The difficulty which arises from the immutability of the Divine decrees, and which some have felt to be so formidable, consists in the habit of looking at these decrees as purposes absolutely to be accomplished, without at the same time taking account of the means by which they are to be accomplished. Men look at the first link of the chain, namely, the decree, and at the last link, which is the accomplishment of the decree, and altogether overlook the intermediate links, which are as essentially parts of the chain as the first and last links. A man sometimes determines to do a certain thing before he considers the means by which he is to do it; but in the Divine mind there is really no succession: past and future are alike present to the Eternal Omniscience. The means are equally foreseen and determined with the end; and though these means are frequently actions which seem to us to proceed solely from the will of man, they are necessary links in the one great chain of Divine providence; and the Sovereign God is the mover, not only at the beginning and at the end, but also at every step of the process by which the end is reached.

A discussion of the abstruse and transcendental questions involved in the doctrine of the Divine Sovereignty is foreign to the purpose of this volume: it is sufficient to say that the alleged incompatibility between the "laws of nature" and the prayers of God's people has no foundation either in true science or in true theology.

* "Reign of Law," p. 62.

Prayer is itself a law of nature, for it is the law of God, written, not on tables of stone, but on the fleshly tables of every man's heart, yet not the less written by the finger of God.

It is scarcely necessary to add, that the Word of God does not speak of prayer simply as a salutary exercise for the benefit of the worshipper, but always regards it as a means for the attainment of an end. If prayer have really no effect in the accomplishment of our desires; if the Divine mind is not accessible,—then prayer is a mockery and a delusion, and cannot possibly be salutary to the worshipper.

But prayer—true prayer—neither mocks God nor deludes man. And with the pure and holy law of God for our guide, we need not suffer our minds to be disturbed by "oppositions of science falsely so called"—of that sort of science, namely, which looks at one side of a subject, and, finding a difficulty, refuses to look at the other side. God's Word does not give testimony which contradicts the testimony of His works: wherever it appears to do so, repeated instances have demonstrated that it is human wisdom, and not God's truth, that is at fault. It may appear to our finite wisdom difficult to understand that prayer can really be effectual; but surely it is the part of Christian humility to take God's Word as the word of faithfulness and truth.

It would not be difficult to show that the blessings which God has absolutely promised, He has promised only in answer to prayer. For example: "I the LORD have spoken it, and I will do it" (Ezek. xxxvi. 37). This is the language of absolute sovereignty—the announcement of a fixed immutable purpose. But observe what follows: "Thus saith the Lord God, I wil yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." This discloses that the inquiry by prayer

was as truly a part of the purpose as the ultimate bestowal of the promised blessing.

Take another example. We find many clear and unmistakable prophecies that the Holy Spirit should rest on the Messiah (Isa. xi. 1, 2; lxi. 1). We know from the Gospel history that these prophecies were fulfilled. We have, therefore, an absolute decree absolutely fulfilled. But, so far from the fulfilment being accomplished without means, it is expressly recorded that the Holy Spirit descended on Christ in answer to His own prayer (Luke iii. 21, 22).

Another very striking illustration of the invariable connexion recognized in Scripture between the means and the end is to be found in the history of Paul's voyage to Rome (Acts xxvii.) The Apostle had been assured in a vision, itself most probably an answer to prayer, that he *must* be brought before Cæsar, and that God had given him the lives of all them that sailed with him. Here was the absolute decree of God. Yet afterwards, when they approached the land, and the seamen were attempting to desert the ship, Paul said to the centurion in charge of the prisoners, "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved." It was by means of the labour of the seamen that they were to be saved from a watery grave, and therefore they could not be suffered to abandon the ship. God might have saved them otherwise: but His purpose was that they should be saved by ordinary means, and these means were as certainly foreseen and cared for as the end itself.

The conclusion is, that it is our duty to employ the means that are within our power; and that if we do this in sincerity, humility, and faith, we are warranted in believing that the end will be attained, not in contravention of God's decrees, or in disturbance of the laws of nature, but in strict fulfilment of both; for what is called

nature is nothing more than the exhibition or expression of the will of God, and the laws of nature are only another name for God's decrees.

"Ask, and it shall be given you." We have no right to expect blessings from God otherwise than in answer to prayer. It is true that our All-merciful Father does give many blessings to those who neither ask Him nor thank Him for them, but receive them as gifts of fortune or fate, deities whose worship is by no means obsolete in this age of progress. But that God sometimes gives, and gives largely, to those who do not ask, is no argument against prayer; it rather adds to the guilt and condemnation of those ungrateful and perverse children, upon whom promises and threatenings, past mercies and past warnings, have alike been expended in vain.

But even when it is admitted that the argument founded on the alleged philosophical absurdity of prayer is untenable, there is still another argument in which the evil heart of unbelief finds refuge. It is alleged that prayer is unnecessary. Many attempt to justify their neglect of prayer by saying, secretly, if not openly, "God knows all our wants and desires: it is therefore unnecessary to pray, as though He needed a monitor." It is assuredly a most blessed truth that our Father in heaven knoweth what things we have need of before we ask Him. Our Lord Jesus Himself reminds His hearers of this (ver. 8); but He does not assign it as a reason why they should not pray, but as a reason why they should not use vain repetitions, after the manner of the heathen, as though they expected to be heard for their much speaking. It is, of course, understood by all intelligent Christians that we do not pray to God because He needs to be informed. He knows, far better than we can know, what we really want; and it is our confidence in the Divine wisdom, as well as in the Divine

goodness, that makes prayer a "reasonable service." We are apt to fancy we want what would be most injurious to us; and often we do not know what to pray for, because, in our short-sightedness, we know not what would be really suitable for our particular circumstances. But God does know; and "if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us" (1 John v. 14), and gives us far more and far better than we ask. He will have us pray, because it is good for ourselves that we should have to ask for what we want. He will have us pray, because prayer is an acknowledgment of our dependence upon Him, and of our confidence in Him. And forasmuch as we can pray to Him acceptably only through Christ the Mediator, He will have us pray, because by so praying we profess our acceptance of that great salvation which He hath provided, of His great love wherewith He loved us. It is, of course, to be understood that the salutary character of prayer as a devotional exercise depends entirely on its efficaciousness as a means to an end. Those who deny that prayer really accomplishes the desires of the true worshipper, and yet suppose that prayer is a salutary exercise, escape from one difficulty only to land themselves in another still greater. It almost resembles the doctrine held by some infidel statesmen, that though Christianity is a fable, it ought to be encouraged as an engine for keeping the minds of the people in subjection, and the ministers of the Church maintained as a sort of moral police force.

The efficaciousness of prayer shall be more fully considered in the next chapter. Meantime, there is yet a third reason sometimes adduced by those who neglect prayer, namely, that *they cannot pray.* And in this there is more truth than in the other arguments. No man can pray aright, any more than he can believe aright,

without the teaching of the Holy Spirit. But God is willing to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him; and thus the ability to pray is within every man's reach. It may not be given to every man to lead the devotions of others; but every man, the most illiterate not excepted, if he really wants a thing, may learn how to ask for it. Every man that has been taught of the Spirit to feel his own necessities can pray, and will pray instinctively, almost before he is aware of it.

> "Prayer is the burthen of a sigh,
> The falling of a tear,
> The upward glancing of an eye,
> When none but God is near."

The woman of the city, that washed the feet of Jesus with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, prayed, and prayed effectually, though she uttered not a word. The bitter tears of contrition and remorse that Peter shed after his fall were prayers, sacrifices more acceptable to God than the smoke of ten thousand rams. The poor publican, who stood afar off, and smote his hands upon his breast, crying only, "God be merciful to me a sinner," prayed, and prayed successfully. The proud Pharisee, who only told God of the good deeds he was in the habit of doing, and asked for nothing because he did not feel that he wanted anything, did not pray at all.

Such are the reasons which men allege in justification of their neglect of a plain duty. But there is no soundness in any of them. If a man wants help from his fellow-man, no such reasons as these will keep him from asking it. If we desire a favour from an earthly sovereign, we are not deterred by the consideration that the laws of the land, so far as we know, make no provision for our case. We believe that the sovereign, if he be disposed to grant our request, will be able to do it in

accordance with the laws. Or, if a child wants bread from his father, he does not stop to think, "My father knows that I have need of bread, and will give it me without my asking;" no: he goes straightway and asks for it. In ordinary life no man thinks of saying he cannot ask for what he wants, if his request be legitimate. But, unhappily, reasons which would not be suffered to have the slightest influence upon men's actions in ordinary life, are deemed quite sufficient to determine their actions in the concerns of religion. These are the best reasons that those who neglect prayer have to offer for their remissness; and yet, after all, they are not the true reasons. The real reason why men do not pray is, that they do not really desire those blessings which God promises, and which He encourages us to seek. Their desires are too much of the earth, earthy; and they dare not mock God by asking Him for what they really desire. They do not covet earnestly the best gifts, but rather those which perish with the using. It was so with the Israelities of old. They had angels' food to eat, but they clamoured for flesh. He gave them their desire, but He sent leanness unto their souls (Ps. cvi. 15). Let those who are disposed to long for earthly things pause, and consider whether in the very difficulty they find in praying for them they do not receive the rebuke of their own consciences for their inordinate affections. If a superabundance of this world's goods were really good for them, they need be neither ashamed nor afraid to pray for it. But they know in their hearts that it is otherwise; and as they cannot ask for what they really desire, and do not desire what God encourages them to pray for, they do not, and will not, pray at all; and thus thousands pass their lives in ungodliness, not perhaps gross sinners, not perhaps altogether without some form of godliness, but utterly denying its

power, and living in habitual disregard of the most solemn responsibilities. Let such prayerless souls seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that they may learn to desire that which is truly good, and then let them ask for it without fear or reserve. Let them not doubt that God will Himself teach them to pray; and in the very enlargement of heart which enables them to come with boldness to the throne of grace, they will find the answer they seek.

## XIX.

## PRAYER—(*continued*).

"And when thou prayest."—MATT. vi. 5.

IN considering the duty of prayer—a duty so obvious, that it may almost be regarded as the prompting of religious instinct, and requiring no express commandment—our attention has been confined to the case of those who, to a great extent, if not altogether, neglect this duty; and the unsoundness of those arguments by which men attempt to justify their neglect has been briefly exposed. The case of those who do pray, or seem to pray, but whose prayers are not acceptable, and consequently not effectual, remains to be considered.

By effectual prayer is meant, prayer that effects its object, or prayer by which the thing asked for is obtained. The very idea of prayer implies that something is sought for: if then we do not, in some shape or other, find the thing sought, we pray to no purpose; our words fall to the ground; it is as if a soldier should fancy himself marching, when he is only marking time; or fighting, when he is only beating the air in the sword exercise, or firing blank cartridge.

It may be presumed that every professing Christian

who has any perception of the responsibilities of his profession does pray at some time and in some way; and that the prayers of such a man are something more than mere natural worship, and something more also than mere formalism or bodily exercise. It may be presumed that all professing Christians who have been instructed in the first principles of the oracles of God understand, theoretically at least, that prayer does not consist in anything outward, but that it is the sincere desire of the soul going forth towards God, whether with audible words or not; and that it must be offered in the appointed way, as set forth in the Word of God. To pray otherwise is not to pray as a Christian, and cannot be effectual.

But apart altogether from those prayers which are not really Christian prayers at all, it is to be feared that thousands of prayers are every day offered in vain: prayers, the general sincerity of which there is no reason to doubt; prayers, the object of which is perfectly legitimate; prayers, which, with appropriate confession and thanksgiving, are offered in the name of Christ, but which, nevertheless, are not answered. Every Christian minister who has exercised himself in the work of pastoral visitation, and has sought in a kindly spirit to acquaint himself with the varied phases of human experience, well knows that effectual prayer is the exception, and ineffectual the rule. A very large number of professing Christians, when they pray, have no real expectation that their prayers will be answered, and do not feel disappointed when they are not answered. Sometimes their prayers *are* answered, and they seem not to know it, or not to recognize the events as answers to their prayers; but more frequently, when they pray, it seems as if there were no ear on high, nor any that regarded. It is very sad, but very true, that men and women call-

ing themselves Christians are content to go on for years in this cold, lifeless, joyless state, pretending, and perhaps deluding themselves with the idea, that they are holding communion with God, while they are all the time experimentally ignorant of what such communion really is. Communion with God implies not only a going forth from us, but also a return from Him. The man, therefore, who prays and observes religious ordinances, and yet receives no response or spiritual benefit, has no communion with God. Prayer is not an end, but a means to an end. And as the means is of God's own appointment, we may be certain that it is well fitted to accomplish the end. If it fail, it is not because of ineptitude in the means, but because it is not rightly used.

The question, therefore, which is thus proposed is of the utmost practical importance. HOW SHALL WE PRAY, THAT OUR PRAYERS MAY BE EFFECTUAL? Prayer has been rightly called a lever, by which the child of God may move the arm that moves the world. This witness is true. How, then, is this wondrous lever to be applied, so that the result may be obtained? What are the characteristics of effectual prayer? And what, on the other hand, are the causes which hinder or neutralize the power of prayer?

The essential characteristics of effectual prayer are these two: FAITH TOWARDS GOD, and FORGIVENESS TOWARDS MAN. These are expressly defined by our blessed Lord Himself: "What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any, that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive you your trespasses" (Mark xi. 24–26).

These two, then, faith and forgiveness, are the essential things: when these accompany prayer, it is effectual.

*First*, concerning FAITH. Our prayers, to be effectual, must be offered in faith.

It is probably unnecessary to say that it is not a mere historical or doctrinal faith that is intended,—not a mere reception of the Bible history as authentic,—not a mere intellectual assent to a particular creed,—but something more. He that cometh to God must of course believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of them that seek Him, or he will not come at all. It can scarcely be conceived that any man can offer prayer to God—that is, offer it as an intelligent Christian—without at least a general belief that he is dependent upon God for life and breath and all things; that he is guilty, and needs forgiveness; polluted, and needs cleansing; and that God is able and willing to supply his needs, to pardon his sins, and to make him clean and whole.

The faith of which our Lord speaks goes beyond this general belief. His words are very striking,—so striking that we cannot all at once grasp their full meaning. "What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." We are tempted to say, Is this possible? Can our Lord really mean what He says? And if this were a solitary passage, it might be difficult to repress such doubts. But we find the same promise repeated in various forms: "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matt. xxii. 22); "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it" (John xiv. 14; "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name He will give it you" (John xvi. 23); "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John xv. 7); and so forth.

Many pious Christians are satisfied to believe that these promises mean nothing more than that God will, on the whole, do what is best for them, and give them such things as He knows to be good for them, in so far as may be consistent with His own sovereign purposes in the government of the world. Content with this passive view of things, they pray in general terms, and seem to think it presumptuous to make specific requests. But if our Lord's promises do not encourage believers to make specific requests, we can have no confidence in the meaning of language. If His promises have any meaning at all, they surely teach that the prayers of the believer should not be confined to generalities, but should give full expression to all the longings of his soul, without fear and without reserve. We are encouraged to pray for special blessings, and to believe that God will give us what we ask. We cannot alter His purposes, and do not desire to do so; but we are taught that His purposes include the prayers of His people. If a child asks bread of his father, the father gives him bread, and not a stone, or something which he does not ask, and does not want. So our heavenly Father bids His children ask in faith, promising to give them what they ask, yea, and much more! much more!

These large and precious promises are made to believers, and to believers only. A believer is one who delights himself in the Lord, who rejoices in Christ Jesus, who earnestly strives to keep God's commandments, and who has no confidence in the flesh. Such a man is encouraged to pray for the desire of his heart, and to believe that God will give him that desire (Ps. xxxvii. 4). The only limitation or condition is that his prayer shall be the prayer of faith. And this limitation, if rightly understood, is quite sufficient to vindicate God's truth, and check man's presumption. The diffi-

culty which many feel in accepting God's promises in all their length and breadth arises from their not comprehending, or not fully considering, the true nature of faith. "Believe, and thou shalt have!" Nothing can seem more simple; and yet thousands pray, and receive no answer, and rush to the conclusion that prayer is a useless form, when the fault is their own: they have prayed, but without faith. The petitioner at the throne of grace must believe that his prayer will be answered, or it will not be answered.

But the question immediately occurs, How can we compel our faith? Our wills cannot say to our understandings or to our hearts, "Believe this or that," and force them to believe it. Faith is not begotten by the will of man, and does not spring up at command. It is the result of inward conviction, and this conviction can rest only upon evidence. We must have some reason for believing, or we cannot believe. To believe without evidence is simply impossible. Even the grossest superstition cannot believe without some evidence, however slight and fallacious. The enlightened Christian believes on solid and sure grounds. He does not fix his desires on whatever may attract his fancy for the passing moment, and suppose that he has only to ask for it and obtain it. He knows he cannot thus ask in faith. In short, before we can really believe that God will grant our desires, we must have some reason for so believing; that is, we must have some evidence that what we desire and ask is according to His will. If it be so, the promise leaves us no room to doubt that "He heareth us" (1 John v. 14).

What sort of reasons or evidences, then, may we expect to find, which shall enable us to pray the prayer of faith?

The evidences of God's will are various, but they may probably all be reduced to one or other of these

three classes, namely, express promises; the leadings of Divine providence; and the motions of the Holy Spirit.

When we have an express promise that God will give such and such things to them that ask Him, that is the surest of all grounds for believing that He will grant them, and for praying accordingly. Spiritual sloth and presumption will no doubt whisper, "If God has promised, He will do or give, whether we pray or not." But the true child of God will not entertain such ungodly suggestions, remembering that God with His promises gives the command to pray for the things promised. We are enjoined in everything by prayer and supplication to make our requests known unto God (Phil. iv. 6). And most evidently, when we find an express promise, we are encouraged to pray, with the spirit and with the understanding also, that God, in His own time and way, will graciously fulfil His word. "Remember the word unto Thy servant, upon which Thou hast caused me to hope" (Ps. cxix. 49). Is the believer, for example, suffering from the power of indwelling sin, the remains of the old Adam? His eye rests on the word, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification" (1 Thess. iv. 3); or on this, "Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, . . . . . that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. v. 25–27); and he prays for victory over temptation in the fullest assurance that his prayer will be heard. Or, to take another example: Is the believer solicitous for the spiritual welfare of his children? Let him take hold of that precious promise, "The mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children" (Ps. ciii. 17). The believing parent who pleads that promise before God, and prays for the conversion of His children, has the strongest possible ground for assurance that God will give him the desire of his heart. Believing

parents often complain that their children, whom they have dedicated to God in baptism, grow up with unbroken hearts, and walk after the flesh, and not after the spirit. But they have probably forgotten that corruption, and not grace, runs in the blood ; and either they have not prayed for their children, or have not prayed in faith. It is true that God has promised : but it is also true, though believers are too apt to forget it, that His promises are for them that seek His face. If we had more faith, we should find that God is always faithful.

We may also know that our prayers are according to God's will, by carefully watching the leadings of His providence. In this way He frequently shows His people what is His will concerning them, and what He designs to do, as clearly as if it were written in His word. He sometimes orders events so wonderfully and unexpectedly, that it becomes plain to any one possessing the smallest measure of spiritual discernment, that such and such is His good pleasure. This is exactly what He has promised : "I will bring the blind by a way that they know not ; I will lead them in paths that they have not known ; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight" (Isa. xlii. 16) : "He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" (Heb. xiii. 5). Such promises give us a right to ask, and confidently to expect, that God will make our path plain. We do not expect an angel to come from heaven and point out a particular course ; but we watch, and wait on the Lord ; we find our way hedged up in this direction, and in that, and only one course left open ; this, then, is the way in which God will have us to walk ; and thus the prayer of faith is answered.

Finally, we may have evidence of God's will in the motions of His Holy Spirit. It cannot be doubted that, without any providential manifestation of His will, God

by His Holy Spirit moves the hearts of believers to desire and pray for certain things. "The Spirit helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for us we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom. viii. 26, 27). It is, therefore, not to be doubted that the believer may expect, if he ask it, that the Holy Ghost will both teach him what he ought to pray for, and how he ought to pray. Without that teaching, indeed, our prayers can never be effectual; and we need never be without it, if we truly desire it, for the gift of the Spirit has been purchased for us by Christ, and we know that God abideth in us by His Spirit which He hath given us (1 John iii. 24). It is not fanaticism, therefore, but simple and reasonable faith, that leads the child of God to expect the direction of the Holy Spirit. The promises of God have, it cannot be denied, been often abused, and made the pretext for the most blasphemous excesses. But this should not engender distrust in the promises, but rather stimulate to greater watchfulness, lest we be taken unawares in the pitfalls of Satan. Every revealed truth, and every promise of God, has been abused and wrested by the unlearned and unstable, to their own destruction. But the coin of the realm is not the less sterling because it is sometimes counterfeited: on the contrary, if there were no true coin, there would be no inducement to utter the spurious. So, the occasional extravagances of those who have pretended to spiritual gifts—Satan himself assuming the appearance of an angel of light—are in reality the very strongest evidence that spiritual gifts have a real existence, and may really be obtained by those that seek them in the appointed way.

In all these cases the believer has satisfactory evidence that his prayers are according to God's will, and consequently he may pray the prayer of faith in the full assurance that he will not pray in vain.

It will, however, very probably occur to the reader that we pray for many things without having any of these evidences that God is willing to grant them. Very frequently we can find no express promise; the leadings of providence do not make our path plain, and we are not conscious of any motion of God's Spirit. In such cases it seems obvious that we cannot pray in full assurance that we shall receive; for Christian assurance is not the presumptuous confidence of a vain imagination, but a reasonable conviction resting upon satisfactory evidence. Nevertheless, even in such cases we are by no means shut out from all exercise of faith. These are precisely the cases in which we know not what we should pray for, and in which we are encouraged to look for direction. If there be no specific evidence on which the eye of faith can rest, we may well be contented with the general assurance "that all things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. viii. 28). We may call into exercise our faith in God's character—in His wisdom, His goodness, His truth—and pray that He will do what is for His own glory, in the enlightened conviction that this will be for our own ultimate and highest advantage.

A moment's reflection will satisfy us that it is in the nature of things impossible that we should in all cases have positive evidence that our specific requests will be granted. The various operations of nature, the processes of animal and vegetable life, the vicissitudes of day and night, and of the seasons, with all meteorological phenomena, are fixed by God's laws, which are very imperfectly known to us. That the prayers of God's people

form golden links in the great chain of causes and effects, is not to be questioned; but it is clear that one believer may pray for one thing, and another for another and quite a contrary thing, at the same time, and in the same part of the world. One man may wish for dry weather, while another may wish for rain; one for heat, another for cold; one for a westerly breeze, another for an easterly; one for one course of events, another for an exactly opposite course. It is manifestly impossible that all these prayers should be specifically answered. But this is no reason why we should not pray, and make known our specific requests to God, in full assurance that we shall not be sent empty away. To avoid unnecessary repetition, however, the fuller elucidation of the subject of speciality in prayer must be reserved until our Lord's words, "Ask, and it shall be given you" (vii. 7), shall come under consideration.

We may now proceed to the second characteristic of effectual prayer, namely, FORGIVENESS TOWARDS MAN.

If it be true that many prayers are ineffectual because they are not offered in faith, probably quite as many are ineffectual because they are not offered in a spirit of forgiveness. If men can, and do, approach the throne of grace without exercising their faith, without light from God's promises, from His providence, or from His Holy Spirit, it is not surprising that they can, and do, approach without having purged their hearts of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, forgetting that they alone whose hands are clean and whose hearts are pure can ascend into the hill of the LORD, or stand in His holy place as acceptable worshippers (Ps. xxiv. 3, 4).

This matter of forgiveness, there is reason to fear, is very imperfectly understood, perhaps because many do not honestly desire to understand it, but shrink from the

conclusions to which they might be led. There are many who feel it to be sinful to cherish vindictive feelings, and would never attempt to retaliate upon those who have aggrieved or offended them, who at the same time have not attained to that degree of Christian love which prompts to free and full forgiveness. They will say of one whom they think an enemy, "I bear him no ill-will; I should be sorry to do him an injury;" and applaud themselves for their charity. They leave their enemy alone, excluding him as far as possible from their thoughts, and then persuade themselves that they are in a fit state for approaching God. But this is not forgiveness. It is at least not that sort of forgiveness which we ask of God for ourselves. We do not ask God to leave us alone, or to leave us to ourselves; we do not pray merely that He will not punish us; we pray that He will blot out our iniquities; that He will receive us graciously, and love us freely. But if we do not freely and fully forgive them that trespass against us; if we be not willing to forget their trespass, and at their desire to receive them again to favour,—how can we hope to obtain what we ask for ourselves? We make ourselves liars before God, and are condemned out of our own mouths; for, in saying "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive." (Luke xi. 4), we profess to forgive "every one that is indebted to us," and on that ground are encouraged to ask forgiveness for ourselves. God does nothing by halves. He either forgives fully, or not at all; and, therefore, if we do not from our hearts forgive our brother's trespasses, we are plainly told that we must not expect forgiveness for ourselves.

What is thus taught us in the Word of God concerning the connexion of forgiveness with effectual prayer is confirmed by the testimony of conscience, and by the very constitution of man.

Conscience, if we would suffer its "still small voice" to be heard amidst the roar of conflicting passions and the tumult of worldly antagonisms, would teach us, that if we would be forgiven, we must forgive. Conscience tells us that it is unreasonable to expect favours which we in our turn are not equally ready to grant, so far as may be in our power. And conscience cannot fail to remind us that, however grievously any of our fellow-men may have offended us, his offence can never be so grievous as the smallest offence that we have committed against God. The smallest sin against the infinitely pure and holy God brings upon us an infinite weight of guilt, for which reparation or expiation is beyond our power. Yet God forgives our debts when we are unable to pay even the smallest instalment. Does not conscience itself tell us, then, that we ought to have compassion on others, and forbear and forgive, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forborne and forgiven us?

The constitution of man teaches the same thing. We are so constituted that we must worship somewhat; and the god which each man worships is that, whatever it may be, which he most admires and loves. The foundation of all worship is admiration and affection. It is impossible for a man to worship any being, real or imaginary, but for some attribute or quality in that being, or for something done, or believed to be done, by that being, which awakens the sentiments of veneration, gratitude, faith, hope, and love. There are, indeed, some degraded tribes of our race that seek, by sacrifices and drink-offerings of blood and self-inflicted tortures, to propitiate a malignant deity, or demon, whom they hate and fear; but this is not *worship* in the proper sense of the term. A man may imagine that by such bribes he keeps suspended the sword that threatens to fall upon him; but the being he worships is the being he loves.

The ancient heathen believed that devout worshippers partook of the character of the gods they worshipped: they believed that by long gazing on the images of the gods they became imbued with their attributes; and they considered it a duty to exhibit in their lives the qualities they admired. They had a separate deity for every virtue and for every vice; and, naturally, the worshippers of each were those in whom the respective virtues and vices were most conspicuous. The worship of saints, images, and pictures, in the Greek and Roman Churches, is simply a relic of this old polytheistic worship, and is explained and defended on substantially the same grounds. Now, there is usually some truth at the root of every belief which has held dominion for a succession of generations over a large portion of mankind. The heroölatry of the ancients, and the hagiolatry of the moderns, with all their gross corruptions, demonstrate this one truth, that we always worship what we most admire and love; and that we cannot in sincerity worship any being of whose nature we are not to some extent partakers.

Apply this to the subject in hand. We profess to worship the living and the true God, and to believe His Word. That Word reveals the character of God, and declares that believers are made partakers of the Divine nature, being born of God by the Holy Spirit, and created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works (2 Pet. i. 4; Eph. ii. 10). If, then, we are truly sons of God by spiritual generation and adoption, we shall be followers of God, and that mind will be in us which was also in Christ, who was the living exemplar of the mind of God. We are so constituted as men, that, if we be true worshippers, we must, to a greater or less extent, according to the measure of our spiritual stature, be conformed to the image of the God whom we worship. Now, "God

is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." "Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love" (1 John iv. 7, 8, 16). God manifests His love towards us by forgiving our sins: if, therefore, we have not forgiveness towards other sin our hearts, we cannot be like Him. The children of this world, who have not, and pretend not to have, the love of God in them, consider the resentment of an injury essential to vindicate their manliness. But the child of God, taught in a higher school, and having the highest type of manliness before him in the man Christ Jesus, has learned to forgive, as he hopes and prays himself to be forgiven.

Do we desire, then, to offer effectual prayer—prayer for which, while we offer it, we may confidently look up to God, expecting an answer? Then BELIEVE and FORGIVE! No test of faith towards God is so crucial as forgiveness towards man. If we love not our brother whom we have seen, how can we love God whom we have not seen? If we doubt the nature of our feelings towards any man, let us try to pray for him. If we shrink from that test, we have reason to feel humbled, and to lie very low in the dust before God. We have need to go again to the fountain, that we may be washed and sanctified, and enabled to come before the mercy-seat with incense and a pure offering. Not till we are thus cleansed can we hope that our prayer will be the effectual, fervent prayer of the righteous man, which availeth much (Jam. v. 16).

The subject of forgiveness will be further considered under the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer.

## XX.

## PRAYER—(*continued*).

"And when thou prayest."—MATT. vi. 5.

IN answer to the question, How shall we pray, that our prayers may be effectual? it has been shown that the essential characteristics of effectual prayer are, Faith towards God, and Forgiveness towards man. It remains to answer the same question *negatively*, by showing what are the hindrances to prayer, or, in other words, what are those causes which either keep us from praying at all, or hinder the exercise of that faith and forgiveness without which we cannot acceptably approach the throne of grace. The importance of this branch of the subject cannot be exaggerated; for it is manifestly impossible to advance steadfastly in our Christian course if we regard not the impediments which Satan flings in our path, and the many weights and drags which he hooks upon our limbs and chariot-wheels, to hold us back, and hinder the free development of our spiritual faculties.

The first of these hindrances, and perhaps the most powerful, is BOSOM SIN, with which may be included besetting sin, for both these terms may be properly applied to the same sins. Our bosom sin, the sin we most cherish, is "the sin which doth so easily beset us"

(Heb. xii. 1); and, conversely, our besetting sin is the sin we fondle in our bosoms, and love to roll as a sweet morsel under our tongues. The sin to which our natural passions and propensities, or our acquired tastes and habits, most incline us, is the sin that most readily tempts us and draws us aside. It is true that the term "bosom sin" is more frequently applied to the sin that is secretly indulged in the heart, while the term "besetting sin" is applied to that which prompts to more gross and overt transgressions. But whether we call it bosom sin or besetting sin, any sin that we regard in our hearts with favour, or towards which we are disposed to look back is sufficient either to keep us altogether from prayer, or to make our prayers ineffectual. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Ps. lxvi. 18).

If any Christian, then, finds himself hindered in prayer; if he finds that he has great difficulty in pouring out his heart before God, or that he has but slight relish for the exercise, either in the closet, the family, or the sanctuary; if he finds that there is no answer, that his requests are not granted, and that his soul is not refreshed and enlarged,—let him beware of saying in his heart, as Satan will most certainly tempt him to say, What profit is there in my prayers? Let such thoughts be resolutely suppressed, as noisome smoke from the bottomless pit. If any man find not both profit and comfort from prayer, he may be assured the fault is altogether his own. There is some Achan in the camp—some wedge of gold or Babylonish garment hidden in his tent—some secret sin, of which he has not fully repented, and which he cannot resolve wholly to forsake. Let him, therefore, make diligent inquest, and give neither sleep to his eyes nor slumber to his eyelids until the troubler is dragged forth, with all his family, and slain at the foot of the Cross.

Perhaps it is covetousness, or worldly ambition, the most insidious of all bosom sins. The Apostle plainly declares that the covetous man is an idolater; and it cannot be doubted that of all idolatries, the worship of gain is the most sordid and degrading; yet many, it is to be feared, are idolaters in this kind without knowing it, or at least without knowing the extent to which the sin has dominion over them. The heart of man is deceitful above all things, and it is difficult to draw the line between the lawful desire for wealth and distinction, with a view to increased usefulness, and the desire for these things which terminates in self. There is continual need to watch the avenues of the heart, that no traitor be lurking there. No idolater can worship God in spirit and in truth. We cannot fear the Lord, and also serve graven images (2 Kings xvii. 41); and whether the image we worship be literally an idol in a temple, or a hoard of coins, or houses, or lands, or wife, or children, the effect is the same; we may have the shouts and the sycophancy of men, but we cannot pray with all our hearts to God, and therefore cannot pray effectually.

Envy, hatred, malice, revenge, are the besetting sins of many, and often unsuspectedly, because in civilized communities they are seldom manifested by open acts of hostility or injury, but rather in the more covert ways of censoriousness and detraction. Can those who indulge themselves in these sins imagine that their offerings to the Lord are of a sweet-smelling savour? "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; purify your hearts, ye double-minded" (Jam. iv. 8).

And what shall be said of pride? the sin that first peopled hell, and the choicest engine of Satan for keeping fallen man in his grasp! Strange, that of all the sins that beset fallen man, that for which he has the

least cause or excuse should be the sin to which he is most prone! No season, no place, no occasion, is so sacred or so solemn but pride will intrude. In our closets we sing our own praises, though we know that our hearts are dungeons of foul vapours, and that their inmost recesses are naked and opened in the eyes of Him with whom we have to do (Heb. iv. 13). In the sanctuary of God, yea, at the very table of the Lord, we are tempted to flatter ourselves on account of our achievements, and to thank God that we are not as other men.

These are specimens of bosom and besetting sins. If these, or any other sins, are fostered in the heart, we cannot pray aright. "Who can understand his errors?" exclaims the Psalmist. Have not all need to echo his prayer, "Cleanse Thou me from secret faults" (Ps. xix. 12)?

A second hindrance to prayer arises from ROVING THOUGHTS.

Every one who has attempted to pray knows that the thoughts are peculiarly apt to wander at the very time when it is most desirable that they should be concentrated. Our subtle and malignant adversary is more active at that time, and frequently succeeds in distracting our attention, and carrying us away on the wings of memory or imagination to brood over the past or speculate on the future. Or ever we are aware, our souls make us like the chariots of Ammi-nadib (Song vi. 12), speeding hither and thither without control, till the hour for devotion has passed, and we rise unrefreshed, with a humiliating consciousness of complicity in our own hindrance and defeat. Roving thoughts are no slight evil; and it is no wonder that many Christians complain that they are almost wholly debarred from enjoyment in prayer by this one device of the enemy.

Generally speaking, the chief cause of roving thoughts is an ill-disciplined mind. Some men have naturally greater powers of abstraction than others; but the man whose natural powers are strongest may make them yet stronger by discipline; for it is unnecessary to say that the mind may be trained to endurance as well as the body. The jockey who has to ride in a horse-race, or the pugilist who has to fight in a match, does not think it too much to subject his body to a long and severe course of training. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown—a wreath of leaves, or a few sordid pieces of money. But Christians, who profess to seek an incorruptible crown, are too frequently unwilling either to keep under their bodies, or to make any consistent effort for the discipline of their souls. If, however, we desire to gain the mastery over our wayward hearts, we must be temperate in all things, not only in the indulgence of our bodily appetites, but also of our tastes and fancies. Bodily exercise—the mere outward form of religion, or those services in which the body alone is engaged—profiteth little: let us exercise ourselves rather unto godliness (1 Tim. iv. 7, 8), cultivating habits of patience, vigilance, and endurance, that our every thought may be brought into captivity unto the obedience of Christ. It is quite possible so to train the mind that we can command our attention, and curb the capricious outgoings of our souls; and if we do not conscientiously and resolutely strive to accomplish this, our prayers will always be hindered, and our progress in the Divine life will be slow and cheerless.

Another cause of roving thoughts is want of due preparation for prayer. Too many appear not to feel the necessity for preparation, but rush into prayer "as the horse rusheth into the battle" (Jer. viii. 6). We do not act thus if we have to appear before an earthly monarch

or ruler, or if we go to solicit a favour from any fellow-creature. We not only think carefully over the subject of our petitions, but usually arrange the very words in which they shall be presented. And while in the presence of earthly dignities, we are too much engrossed with the business that has brought us thither, too anxious for a favourable result, and too fearful of being rejected, to permit our thoughts to be occupied with anything foreign to the matter in hand. If we were equally concerned that our prayer to God should be effectual, we should not so readily yield to the temptation of roving thoughts. Hence the best preventive against such thoughts is the preparation of the heart by reading the Word and meditating therein. If we desire our prayers to be real transactions, and not empty formalities, we must consider beforehand what things we want, and then, in humility and faith, with singleness of heart and simplicity of utterance, ask for those things. These preparatory exercises have a subduing effect upon the imagination; they enable us to grapple more vigourously with the realities of spiritual experience, and with the exigencies of our Christian warfare, and consequently to present our prayers in a more intelligent and acceptable manner.

The pressure of worldly cares must also be mentioned as a very fruitful source of roving thoughts. Our minds are apt to be overcharged with anxieties concerning our daily business in this world—our fruits and our goods, our political or professional engagements, our projects, of what nature soever—and under such pressure it is difficult, very difficult, to fix our thoughts exclusively on the subjects of our prayers. There is no truer sentence in the Bible than this: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (vi. 24). If we are laying up treasure in earth, and neglecting the heavenly trea-

sure, it is not surprising that we find it almost impossible to confine our thoughts to that which has only the second place in our affections. The remedy here, therefore, must be found in the increase of spiritual vitality, and this is to be found in a closer walk with God, and a more earnest clinging to the Saviour. If we seek to live by faith, and to walk in the strength of Christ, our thoughts will turn to Him, not by constraint of the will, but by the attraction of holy sympathy. The savour of His good ointments is poured forth upon our chastened yet ardent souls: when He draws, we run after Him: the King brings us into His chambers: we are glad and rejoice in Him, and remember His love more than wine (Song i. 3, 4): and the prayers that ascend from souls so quickened and anointed are sweet, fervent, and effectual. Worldly thoughts, like the unclean birds from Abraham's sacrifice, are incontinently scared away. Travellers in tropical and semi-tropical climates well know that their toil-worn limbs will court sleep in vain in the open air, if they do not kindle large fires, to protect them from the insects that fly by night. Similarly, nothing is so effectual against worldly thoughts, or the buzzing and biting of worldly cares, as to keep alive a large fire of devotion in our hearts. Let the pure incense of love ascend from the altar of our souls, and our prayers will not be hindered.

The third hindrance to prayer which calls for notice may be described as WANT OF PURPOSE.

There is reason to fear that, with many professing Christians, prayer, if not absolutely mechanical, is to a great extent a mere matter of routine. When the time of the morning, or evening, or noon-day sacrifice draws near, they approach the altar, but too frequently without having considered what they have to offer, or what

they are to ask. They go to pray, not impelled by any craving of the soul, but because the bell has been rung, or the clock points to the accustomed hour. Can this be a Christian—is it even a reasonable—service? Do not even the Papists and the Mussulmans the same? In everything of a merely formal character the followers of the beast and of the false prophet far surpass those who profess to follow the Lamb. In a Romish cathedral, when thousands of assembled worshippers fall prostrate at the tinkling of the mass-bell; or in a Mohammedan city, when the voice of the muezzin calls from the minarets of the mosque, and ten thousand carpets are spread, and ten thousand heads are bowed towards Mecca,—the spectacle is not devoid of a certain sublimity, which affects the spectator in spite of himself, before he has time to reflect on the inanity of such worship. When reason has emancipated itself from the dominion of the senses, we can mourn over those deluded souls that feed on ashes, and appear before God with a lie in their right hand. It is indeed very sad: but it is not without a lesson of instruction; for while we can all discern and deplore formalism in others, we are apt to forget that we ourselves have often sinned in like kind. Every man is in danger of sinning thus who prays without a purpose.

Prayer is to the soul what eating and drinking are to the body, a divinely-appointed means of nourishment. Now there are many in this world whom God has so surrounded with plenteousness that they know not what hunger and thirst really are. They have never had to live on half a biscuit and a gill of water a day: they have never had to ride from sunrise to sundown in the face of a hot wind without a drop of water, and at night found nothing but a muddy pool from which to slake their thirst. They have been accustomed all their lives

to eat and drink at certain hours, and when the bell rings they go to their meals, not because they are suffering from hunger and thirst, but because it is meal-time. Thousands of professing Christians pray, or rather go to prayer, in the same way. They are so surrounded with blessings in these days of light and liberty and privilege, that they fancy they have all and abound, and have need of nothing: they have no spiritual hunger or thirst. They know not what it is to pant for the living God as the hart panteth after the water-brooks; they have never felt the want of a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; never longed for rivers of water in a dry place, or for the shadow of a great rock in a weary land (Isa. xxxii. 2). The language of prayer in which they are sometimes called to join falls on their ear "as a very lovely song," but finds no echo from their own experience. They have a general impression that prayer is necessary and right, and would on no account omit so becoming an observance; but too frequently they pray without any definite purpose, and thus offer vain oblations.

Is it necessary to say that such a state is highly dangerous—that, if spiritual life have at all begun in the soul, such a state is a sure indication of that fatal lethargy, that settlement on the lees, which is the prelude to corruption and decay? It is a symptom of spiritual disease calling for active treatment and strict regimen; a disease which provokes the righteous judgments of God. When "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked" (Deut. xxxii. 15) against the restraints of God's law; when they lightly esteemed the Rock of their salvation, and degenerated into formality and deadness,—then God searched Jerusalem with candles, and punished the men that said in their hearts, "The

Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil" (Zeph. i. 12)—the very language of a prayerless soul! And so, when Christians cease to pray, or become purposeless in their prayers, and thus exhibit symptoms of declining spirituality, God deals with them as a loving Father, and visits them with rebuke and chastisement, that they may feel their need, and cultivate a more dependent spirit. But these sad declensions and their consequent discipline might be avoided, if we would exercise more vigilance against this pernicious habit of praying without purpose. To this end let us seek that we may drink more largely into the Spirit of Christ (1 Cor. xii. 13), and may know by blessed experience the length and breadth and depth and height of that love which passeth knowledge. We shall thus learn to know our own wants better; and our prayers, though they may not be expressed in rounded periods, or accompanied by the swinging of censers or the soft sounding of silver bells, will not be without a purpose, and will come up before God as an odour of a sweet smell. Prayer is not a mere act of homage; it is not a ceremony; it is an efficient cause put in operation by a real power for the production of a real effect; it is the offering up of real desires to one who really hears, and who is both able and willing to send us an answer in peace. Surely, then, it is an essential preliminary to such a transaction that we carefully consider what it is that we really want and desire, and whether we can come before the Lord with full purpose of heart and in a manner agreeable to His will. If we can do this, then let us ask in faith, nothing wavering, and nothing doubting.

A fourth hindrance to prayer is WANT OF PERSEVERANCE.

Perseverance in prayer is constantly enjoined in

Scripture, and is as necessary as fervency and sincerity. Indeed, for want of perseverance, other qualities are often without effect. But it is much more difficult to be persevering than to be fervent and sincere. It is comparatively easy to run well and freely in the outset of our course, when we are rejoicing in all the warmth of our first love, and bound vigorously forward in the exuberance of new-born zeal; but it is not so easy to maintain the fire and the pace. Young converts frequently pray with great earnestness; but when they do not find a speedy answer to their prayers they are discouraged, if not offended, and show themselves wanting in the grace of patience, the offspring of Christian courage and sobriety (2 Pet. i. 5, 6), and not to be acquired without long experience in the school of Christ. Comparatively few Christians have realized, and many are entirely ignorant of, that holy importunity which lays hold of a promise, and cries night and day for the outpouring of the blessing, until the windows of heaven are opened and the shower descends. And thus in too many instances the fire of devotion cools down, and the unstable and faint-hearted worshipper sinks into a mere formalist, if he do not altogether fall back to the world. What more complete hindrance can Satan himself desire?

Now, if Christians would pray effectually, they must pray importunately. "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke xviii. 1). "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. v. 17). "Continue in prayer" (Col. iv. 2). Jacob wrestled all night with the Angel of the Covenant, who was no other than Christ Himself, saying, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." And so he got the name of Israel, because he had power with God and with men, and had prevailed. He rose, indeed, from the struggle at break of day with halting limbs

and exhausted frame; but he did not rise until he had obtained the blessing he had sought. Our blessed Lord Himself has also left us an example of perseverance in prayer. Frequently He passed many hours together in prayer to God, as, for example, during the night which preceded the ordination of the twelve Apostles (Luke vi. 12; see also Matt. xiv. 23; Mark vi. 46; Luke ix. 28, *sqq.**) And His whole teaching impresses upon us the same lesson. He tells us of a friend who would not rise at midnight from his bed, at the mere call of friendship, to supply the wants of his friend, but who was compelled to do so by the importunity of the applicant. And similarly, an unjust judge, who feared not God, neither regarded man, was compelled to hear the cause of a poor widow, and avenge her of her adversary, lest by her continual coming and importunate crying she should weary him. If, then, where the obligation to comply with the request was comparatively small, importunity was crowned with success, shall it be less effectual when we have God's own promises to plead, and His eternal truth to encourage our pleadings? Shall not God, in His own time and way, which are always the best, answer the prayers of His people that cry night and day unto Him, though He may long forbear, for the trial of their faith and patience, and hide His face from them as though He heard not? (Luke xi. 5–8, xviii. 2–7.)

Let no man's heart therefore fail him. Let no man be discouraged. The Philistine that defied the armies of the living God has been encountered, and his head bruised unto death by our Good Shepherd, our Champion, and our King. David's Lord and David's Son is our light and our salvation: of whom, then, shall we be

* From which it would appear that the Transfiguration was an answer to prayer.

afraid? Alas! how slow are even the most advanced Christians to understand that discipline and trial are needful for their perfection! Trials come to all of us; but how seldom does tribulation produce patience, and patience experience! (Rom. v. 3, 4.). How few come forth from the furnace brighter and purer! Faithful Abraham hesitated not to offer up Isaac, his beloved son, his only son, the heir of the promises, of whom it had been said, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." He toiled up the mountain in faith and prayer, staggering not at the promise of God through unbelief; and so, when his faith had reached the climax of its triumph, and the father's hand was stretched forth to slay his son, he heard the reclaiming voice from heaven, and saw the ram caught in the thicket by the horns. The God of Abraham is our God. His hand is not shortened, that it cannot save: His ear is not heavy, that it cannot hear (Isa. lix. 1). May we not feel assured, therefore, that when God does not immediately grant our petitions, it is not because He is unwilling, but because He sees that we are not ready to receive what we desire? It may be that our sins have separated between us and our God, and have hid His face from us that He will not hear (ver. 2). Or we have need to be more humbled, more weaned from the world and the flesh, and made more keenly sensible of our dependence. It is for our own profit that we are made to wait, that we may be more meet for the reception of blessings, and that our enjoyment of them, when they come, may be more intense and lasting.

A fifth hindrance, very frequently and most disastrously effectual, is RESERVE IN PRAYER.

When prayer is defined as the offering up of our desires to God, it is meant that the offering should be complete, offered with the whole heart, and without

reserve. When we pour out our hearts before God, we must pour out all that is in our hearts. Otherwise we only mock God, who demands, not a partial surrender of our hearts, but our whole heart. Yet how many attempt to worship God with reservations! They do not make full and particular confession of their sins, but keep back something which they do not wish to think sinful, and will not acknowledge to be so. They ask for grace to forsake their sins; but there is some darling lust which they cannot resolve to relinquish, some little fox that spoils the tender grapes of the Lord's vineyard (Song ii. 15), but concerning which they say in their hearts, "Is it not a little one?" and fancy that God will not exact too rigorously concerning it. Some, like Ananias and Sapphira, profess to give up all for Christ, and yet keep back part of the price. Satan fills their hearts to lie to the Holy Ghost. That they deceive their fellow-men, and obtain applause which they do not merit, is the least part of their sin: they have not lied unto men, but unto God (Acts v. 1–4).

Here, then, is another point on which it behoves Christians strictly to examine themselves. When we pray, do we make a clean breast of it, or are we guilty of the unutterable folly of attempting to hide anything from Him from whom nothing can be hidden? If such reserve be habitual with us, we need not wonder that we are unwilling to pray, that we find no refreshment in prayer, and that we do not obtain what we ask. Let us put away from us all such unworthy thoughts. Though God knows all, He will have us tell Him all, that He may prove us whether we are really humbled or not, and whether we approach Him with true hearts. Let us, therefore, put entire confidence in Him, trusting Him at all times, under all circumstances, and for all things. If He bids us look for manna daily, and promises to send it daily, let us trust Him, and not hoard

it till to-morrow, to find it a mass of corruption. If He forbids us to look for manna on the Sabbath, let us not go forth to look, for we shall not find it. In a word, let us have faith in God, and believe that He means what He says. None that so trust in Him shall be desolate, or put to confusion.

Yet one other hindrance, which operates very extensively and destructively, remains to be mentioned, namely, THE SPIRIT OF VARIANCE.

The necessity of forgiveness towards men, if we desire our prayers to be effectual, has already been shown. And it is scarcely necessary to add, that forgiveness in its fullest sense includes the removal of all causes of offence or variance, so far as lies in our power. Very frequently, however, when there is no specific ground for quarrel, there is a great want of cordiality in the family, in the social circle, or in the congregation. How often does estrangement arise between relatives, friends, or Christian brethren, which can be traced to no distinct cause, but probably proceeds from some latent jealousy or suspicion, which they would be ashamed to express in words, even if it were possible to do it! A spirit of variance is thus evoked, which, from its very indefiniteness and impalpability, it is extremely difficult to quell. The only certainty connected with it is, that so long as it continues to prevail, the prayers of those under its influence are hindered. The vines cannot flourish, the pomegranates cannot bud, while this frosty wind holds. It is as when the sun is behind a cloud: there must needs be a lack of vital heat and energy until the sunshine returns.

The Apostle Peter specially refers to domestic disunion as a hindrance to prayer. "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with your wives according to knowledge,

giving honour unto the wife as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life: that your prayers be not hindered" (1 Pet. iii. 7). Where there is discord in a family, there can be no enjoyment in prayer; and this rule applies not only to families, but also to the Church of Christ, which is God's family. One main reason why the Gospel has so little influence in the world, and why the prayers of Christians for its extension and power are so much hindered, is the prevalence of this spirit of variance. We have need, then, to search our hearts, and see that this unclean and hateful spirit has found no lodgment there. It is unhappily true that they who are themselves desirous of peace, and earnestly following the things that make for peace, cannot always accomplish their wishes; but we cannot hope for the blessing of God on the work and labour of our hands, so long as we are not honestly and faithfully doing what in us lies to live peaceably with all men, "for where envy and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work" (Jam. iii. 16). Who shall tell the manifold evils that have flowed from this bitter fountain? Who shall tell the goodness and the surpassing pleasantness of brethren dwelling together in unity? The idea of a Visible Catholic Church is indeed a noble one, for it is God's idea, not man's. Man has attempted to realize it, and has endeavoured to compel uniformity and unanimity by fire and sword, but in vain. The boasted unity of Rome is a despicable sham. Nor will this great idea become a living reality until He comes who is the Prince of Peace, under whose benignant sceptre righteousness and peace shall flourish, and the weapons of controversy shall be buried for ever.

The hindrances which have been specified are of a general character; but, besides these, every individual

Christian has probably his own peculiar hindrances, which he must discover for himself by diligent self-examination, and remove by the exercise of faith and steadfast looking unto Jesus. His sympathy and His grace are sufficient for every case ; for He is our strength and our song, and He alone is our salvation.

But let it be observed, finally, that it is God's prerogative to bring good out of what is apparently evil. Many will not read their Bibles, because they encounter difficulties in its pages. And, in like manner, many will not pray, because they are hindered. But neither the difficulties of the Bible, nor the hindrances we experience in prayer, are without their advantages. They remind us that this world is not our rest. Our communion with God, while we abide in this earthly tabernacle, is liable to frequent interruptions ; and it is a cause for deep self-abasement that these interruptions in so many cases come from ourselves—from our own rebellious lusts and carnal hearts. Nevertheless, let us not be cast down or dismayed ; for in the day that we cry to the Lord out of the depths, He will answer us, and strengthen us with strength in our souls (Ps. cxxxviii. 3). Let us look earnestly to our risen Saviour our Great High Priest, who knows all our trials and imperfections, and has a part in every pang that rends the human breast. Let us not doubt that He sympathizes with us in all our conflicts, that He will sprinkle our unworthy offerings with His own blood, and Himself present them before the mercy-seat. Let these considerations animate us in all our watching and waiting and working and fighting, and help us to anticipate the blessed day when our watch-fires shall have ceased to burn ; when the implements of our toil, and the arms of our battle-field shall have been for ever laid down ; when we shall serve Him day and night without let or

hindrance; when we shall see Him face to face with fulness of joy, and the utmost and most ardent longings of our hearts shall be immeasurably exceeded.

May the good Lord hearken and do, and make no long tarrying, for His name's sake! AMEN.

## XXI.

## PRAYER—(*continued*).

"And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

"But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

"Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him."—MATT. vi. 5–8.

HAVING considered the Nature and Duty of Prayer, the Characteristics of Effectual Prayer, and the Hindrances to it, with a prolixity for which the importance of the subject and the prevalence of erroneous views must be the apology, it is time at length to proceed to the proper subject of the verses before us—namely, The Manner in which Prayer should be Offered.

The subject is more extensive than may at first be supposed; for it includes, not only the selection and arrangement of topics, and the style of language employed, but also all questions relating to the times, places, postures, and other external circumstances most suitable for prayer, together with the whole question of liturgies, or prescribed forms of prayer. With regard to the selection and arrangement of topics, our Lord

Himself has furnished us with a perfect example in the form which He taught His disciples, and which it will be necessary to consider in detail. With regard to the other questions, most of them are of a nature that calls for no discussion in these pages. Our Lord's instructions in the verses before us supply certain general principles, which admit of extensive application, and are sufficient to direct us in practice.

These instructions, it will be observed, are almost wholly of a negative character; that is, they are directions rather as to what we should avoid, than as to what we should positively do. And one obvious inference from this absence of positive direction is, that in the worship of God externals are comparatively unimportant, and that the chief concern of the worshipper should be that his prayers be sincere, fervent, and with a purpose—the outpouring of a heart resting with entire confidence in God through Christ, and breathing charity and forgiveness towards men.

Our Lord simply directs us to avoid two manifest errors—namely, *Ostentation*, and *Vain Repetitions*.

First, Of OSTENTATION. Our Lord warns us against the practices of the hypocrites of that day, the self-righteous Pharisees, who, it appears, were in the habit of making their private and personal devotions in the synagogue or place of public worship, or in the public streets, where the eyes of men were upon them, so that it might be seen and remarked how pious they were. They sought no higher reward than to be seen of men, that they might thus obtain that sort of confidence which furnished them with opportunities of devouring widows' houses, and practising other extortions and excesses for the gratification of their covetous and carnal desires. With the ignorant multitude a sanctimonious exterior

often passes current for genuine religion; and it was upon the superstitions of the multitude that they traded. All they did was for a pretence: the answer of a good conscience, and the eternal rewards of the heavenly inheritance, they utterly despised and neglected.

In opposition to this hypocritical mockery, our Lord enjoins that our personal devotions should be offered in secret. His language implies that we should have a closet, or private chamber, or at least some place of retirement from human observation, and that we should there, in strict seclusion, pray to our Father which is in secret. Prayer, He would teach us, is a transaction between God and our own souls, to which human witnesses are unnecessary, and ought not to be admitted. It is enough that God sees and hears us: our fellowmen will take knowledge of us that we have been in secret with God, not by seeing us pray or appear to pray, but by the savour of love and joy which is given forth from our whole lives. There seems to be no reference here to public prayer, or to social or family prayer; though with respect to these also the same principle must be maintained. When we pray in company with others, it is of course impossible to avoid being seen of men; but then this ought not to be our object, either in attending public worship, or in prayer-meetings, or in kneeling at the family altar. On this point professing Christians have need to examine themselves. Are there not some that attend the house of prayer with more or less regularity, who have no family worship in their houses, and who seldom, if ever, enter into their closets, and pray to their Father in secret? Even of those who do not neglect to assemble their households for prayer, are there not some that frequently forget, or very carelessly and hastily perform, their private devotions? And is it not therefore plain that

their leading motive is that they may be seen of men? The idea seems to occur to them, that if they omit those duties which fall under the observation of others, they will provoke censorious remarks; but as for the closet duties, no one can tell whether they have been observed or not, and therefore they need not rise from their beds in the morning, or leave the pleasant evening party, or the amusing book or game, a moment sooner than their own inclination prompts. Let those who are ready to condemn the hypocrisy of the Pharisees look well into their own hearts, and see if a lump of the same leaven be not secretly fermenting there! The natural tendencies of our corrupt and deceitful hearts are all towards present advantage: hence many attend public worship because their doing so adds to their respectability in a professedly Christian country, and frequently leads, or is expected to lead, to business connexions. When such formalists are removed, in the providence of God, to a land wherein public sentiment is less concerned about religious observances, they feel no obligation to maintain a testimony for Christ, but, after some feeble and speedily-stifled compunctions, throw off the mask, and avouch the world to be their god. Many, again, keep up family worship for no better reason than to escape the scandal which they fear would arise if it were known that they, as men professing godliness, omitted it. And by a grievously large number of nominal Christians, closet-prayer, of which God alone is cognizant, and of which the advantage, if any, is supposed to be future and distant, is either entirely neglected, or confined to a few hasty sentences, uttered with a preoccupied mind—a barren form, observed because conscience will not tolerate its total omission, and not because there is any definite consciousness of spiritual wants, or any believing expectation of an answer.

Are these things so, or are they not? If what has been suggested as matter for self-examination have any foundation in fact—and in dealing with such a subject exaggeration would be as culpable as reserve—can there be any difficulty in understanding why there is so small an amount of spiritual life in the congregations of the Visible Church, and why the Lord's work progresses at such a miserable snail's pace? How many of the ostensible worshippers go up to the house of God really to pray, and to learn wisdom from the living Word, and how many go to be seen of men? And out of the whole mass of church-goers how many are closet-worshippers? While the public services of the sanctuary are to so great an extent attended in a formal and ostentatious spirit, and while secret prayer is so frequently pretermitted, it is not to be wondered either that the Visible Church generally is in a low, sleepy, stagnant condition, or that true religion exercises a very slender influence upon the ungodliness of the world. It admits of no question, being a simple fact in the history of the Church, that the Gospel has always been preached with more power, and religious awakenings have always been more extensive and permanent, when there has been among the Lord's people an increase of secret prayer. The history of all religious revivals clearly demonstrates that they take origin, not in the pulpit, but in the closet and the prayer-meeting. Let those who sigh and cry for the depressed state of Zion, and bewail the decadence of pulpit-power, consider how far their own want of faith and prayer may be to blame for the change that has come upon the fine gold! May the Lord pour out upon His people a spirit of grace and supplication! "Wilt Thou not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?" (Ps. lxxxv. 6.)

The subject of VAIN REPETITIONS next claims our attention. "When ye pray," saith our Lord, "use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking." The Greek word here employed* properly signifies to stutter or babble, and hence, to repeat unmeaningly the same words, or to reiterate the same ideas in slightly different words, or to employ a multiplicity of words to express the same thought, or, finally, to speak without purpose or relevancy. Our Lord teaches that we must not *battologize* in prayer, as though God did not hear, or as if we expected to be heard for our much speaking.

The heathen were of old, and are to this day, addicted to this practice. We have a specimen of it in the prayer of the priests of Baal (1 Kings xviii. 26), "O Baal, hear us," which they repeated incessantly from morning even until noon. And another in the cry of the Ephesian populace, which, when they heard that S. Paul was a Jew, "all with one voice, about the space of two hours, cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians" (Acts xix. 34). A Hindoo devotee of the present day will sit for hours together repeating in a low monotonous tone the name of Brahma, whom he worships as the Creator, and the mere repetition of whose name he believes to be meritorious, and efficacious as a preservative against evil.†

* Βαττολογέω, *balbutio, loquor ut Battus,* (*I stutter, I speak like Battus,*) a certain prince of the Cyrenians, who had a weak, lisping voice, and a distressing impediment in his speech.—SCAPULA, *sub voce* Βάττος; HERODOT. *Melp.* 155; ALFORD, *in loco.*

† The Brahmins worship the Divine Unity under the triliteral name of AUM, which is composed of the initial letters in Sanscrit of Brahma, *the Creator;* Vishnu, *the Preserver;* and Siva, *the Destroyer,* which constitute the Trimurti, or Hebrew Triad. In the cavern-temple of Elephanta, near Bombay, is found to this day a colossal representation of the Trimurti, fifteen feet high. It is a huge bust, with three heads joined together, and is regarded by all Hindoos as an object of the highest veneration.

But perhaps the most remarkable example of heathen battology is to be found in the MANI, or praying-cylinder of Thibet, a brief notice of which, as it will relate to a part of the world little known, which is as yet destitute of a vernacular Bible, and is almost untrodden by "the feet of him that bringeth good tidings," may not be unacceptable.

The great central table-land of Asia, which includes the whole Chinese Empire, with Mongolia, Man-chooria, and Thibet, is the abode of more than three hundred millions of the human race, one-third of the population of the globe, who profess one religion, or superstition, known as Buddhism, which prevails also in the adjacent countries of Japan, Burmah, Siam, &c. In China, and some other parts of this vast region, other forms of superstition appear; but the worship of Buddh, or Buddha, with various modifications, is the most prevalent. The primary idea of the Buddhists is, that there is one supreme self-existing Deity, who has manifested himself on earth at various successive periods, in the persons of men, who for their virtues have been subsequently absorbed into the Deity, and are, therefore, worshipped with divine honours. The last and most illustrious of these incarnations was called Buddha. The Buddhists all hold that the existence of man in a material body, subject to pain, disease, and death, is the sum of all evil; and consequently they hold that the highest happiness attainable or desirable is annihilation, or rather the destruction of their personal identity, and being absorbed into Buddha. The Thibetans worship a living Buddha, or Grand Lama, in whom they believe the Deity to dwell. It is this constant desire and expectation of being absorbed into Buddha that has prompted the one prayer which every Buddhist offers as frequently as possible. In the Thibetan language this prayer is called

the "Sadakshara Mantra," or "six-syllable charm." The words are, "AUM MANI PANI AUM," or, as written by some, "AUM MANI PADMI AUM;" which literally means, "GOD JEWEL LOTUS GOD." The name AUM is the name of the Deity, common to both Buddhists and Hindoos. MANI, which signifies "jewel," is one of the titles of Buddha. PANI, or PADMI, signifies "the lotus," a plant celebrated from remote antiquity, and of which many varieties are described by botanists. It is anodyne and narcotic, and is said to produce in those who chew its beans a sense of perfect complacency and contentment, accompanied with a *loss of personal identity*, and without the dangerous excitement of opium or alcohol The lotus is accordingly a sacred symbol with Buddhists, and their images of Buddha are always made sitting on a throne, the upper edge of which is carved to resemble the petals of the lotus, so that the god appears to be seated on the top of the flower. "Mani Pani," therefore, signifies "the jewel of the lotus," or "Buddha (sitting) on the lotus." The name "Aum" is repeated at the close of the formula; though sometimes the last word is said to be HOONG, or Amen.* The words are simply an ejaculation of adoration equivalent to "Glory to Buddha." The mention of the symbolical lotus, however, gives the key to the secret intention of the prayer, namely, that the worshipper may lose his identity in Buddha. The Chinese Buddhists use another formula, "OM ME TO PHUT" (OM being the same as AUM), which signifies, "God, may I pass into Phut, or Buddha."†

* See Mr Simpson's account in *Good Words*, 1867, p. 847.

† The doctrine, or tradition, of an incarnate Deity pervades all heathen mythologies. The Buddhist incarnations are the same with the Hindoo avatars of Vishnu. This and many other heathen traditions are evidences for the common origin of the whole human family. A philosophical

In Thibet this prayer is not only uttered with audible voice, by man, woman, and child, on every possible occasion, but is also written in every possible form, and in every possible place; each utterance, whether in speech or writing, being regarded as a specifically meritorious action, and as exercising a positive influence towards the absorption desired. The lamas, or priests of Buddha, who live together, like Romish monks, or Greek caloyers, in houses called "lamaseries," spend their days in muttering this one formula in a low, monotonous, melancholy chant, accompanied at times by the beating of drums and clashing of cymbals. Some of the wealthier Thibetans maintain a lama of their own, for no other purpose but to go about the country with a chisel and mallet, carving this formula on rocks and stones, or wherever they can find room for it, the sculptured utterances going to the credit of the patron who pays for them. But the most marvellous of the Thibetan expedients is the praying-cylinder, which is simply a hollow cylinder, of various dimensions, set up perpendicularly, and caused to revolve on its axis, always in the same direction, which is that of the sun's apparent course, from east to west. Into these cylinders they put sheets of paper, (which they make from the pulp of a species of laurel,*) on each of which the same everlasting sentence, *Aum Mani Pani Aum*, is written one hundred and thirty times. Four of these are pasted together to form one larger sheet, and ten thousand of these large sheets are put into one of the largest cylinders, which is made to revolve twice every minute. Thus in one hour they offer this prayer six hundred and twenty-fou

account and comparison of the various ancient and modern mythologies is a desideratum in theological literature.

* *Daphne cannabina.* The Chinese paper is made from the same plant —*Hæberlin's Letters to the British and Foreign Bible Society.*

millions of times, which, if continued for a year, gives the number of five billions and a half. The prayers go to the credit of the worshipper who puts them into the cylinder, which can be turned by one man, who must repeat the formula aloud before he begins to turn, and also when he ceases, or the whole performance is invalidated. Thus these poor heathen imagine that while they are eating, sleeping, or labouring, they are, by the revolutions of the wheel, laying up for themselves a good foundation for the future, or rather hastening their progress towards that loss of identity which is their notion of heaven.

These prayer-wheels or cylinders are to be found everywhere in Thibet. Sometimes human agency is dispensed with, and the wheels are placed in streams, so as to be turned by the current; sometimes fixed upon their tents, and turned by the wind; sometimes in niches outside their temples, that the passer-by may be able to give them a turn. Long rows of them are sometimes found set up, like small windmills, to be set whirling by the breeze; and as if this were not enough, they have rough stone dykes erected, sometimes half a mile long, and covered with slates, every slate bearing the invariable formula, written by a lama. And it should be understood that the wheels or cylinders are not inventions solely designed for a mechanical offering of prayer. In almost all heathen superstitions, the wheel is a sacred symbol, and to imitate the revolution of a wheel, in some way or other, is an act of religious worship. The Whirling Dervishes, the wheels of Jaga-Naut, and the wheel fixed in the pedestal of Buddha's throne, are separate examples of the same symbol, which has reference to the revolutions of the heavenly bodies, and the vicissitudes of the seasons. The wheel of the Scandinavian god Seater, and the *Deiseil* of the Druids,

are forms of the same superstition. The revolution of the Thibetan cylinders is therefore an essential part of the worship; and where there is no cylinder, the worshipper himself circumambulates. Whoever passes one of the stone dykes must go on one side and return on the other, thus performing in effect a circumambulation. This is the only prayer the Thibetan Buddhists offer; and they offer it for all purposes, and on all occasions. If a childless parent desires offspring; if a traveller desires a safe journey; a merchant a good market,—he employs a lama to write this prayer on a slate, which the worshipper himself deposits on the village dyke, and believes that he has done a meritorious act, which deserves success, if it does not always command it.

The extravagance of the Thibetan battology is almost sublime. Believing it a duty to do this thing, they do it conscientiously and thoroughly. Their zeal unhappily is not according to knowledge; but not the less does it convey a just rebuke to those who know the truth, and yet are not influenced by its power; who believe that there is one living and true God, but do not worship Him in spirit and in truth; who draw near to Him with the mouth, and honour Him with the lips, while their heart is far from Him. What better are such worshippers than praying-machines?

Much speaking and vain repetitions, then, are the evils which our Lord exhorts us to avoid. "God is in heaven," says Solomon, "and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few" (Eccles. v. 2). As a general rule, there can be no doubt that prayers should be short, and that too many topics should not be introduced at the same time. Nothing can be a greater offence against good taste, nothing a greater hindrance to pure devotion, than a long rambling prayer, to which it is almost [redacted] listen with undivided attention, and in

which the chief object seems to be to conceal poverty of thought under a superfluity of words.

At the same time, we are not to suppose that our Lord, in cautioning us against battology, intended to prohibit all enlargement or continuance in prayer, or even the repeated offering of the same prayer in the same words. The error He condemns is long continuance in prayer, or the reiterating of particular formulas, without any devotional spirit in the worshipper, as though the mere utterance of the words was in itself meritorious or efficacious. The Church of Rome, for example, prescribes numerous litanies, and other devotional offices, in honour of the Virgin Mary and other saints, which contain the most puerile battology. The Virgin or saint is invoked by an interminable list of titles, many of them absolutely blasphemous as applied to a creature,* and after each title the people are taught to respond, "Pray for us." In every book of devotion sanctioned by the Church of Rome we find indulgences, or remissions of the penances or purgatorial punishment due to sin, promised to those who repeat certain prayers a certain number of times. Of course, the people are told to repeat them with "good intention;" but, practically, it is well known that the main thing regarded is to accomplish the prescribed number of repetitions; in which some virtue must be supposed to exist, or why are they prescribed? And, accordingly, those who have faith in such repetitions use a rosary, or string of beads, by which they keep a tally of the number of times they repeat the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, the Creed, or other formula, and thus make sure that the appointed number shall be duly accomplished. One could be

* For example: "Queen of Heaven, Queen of the World, Window of Heaven, Gate of Paradise, Tabernacle of God, Heavenly Ladder, Mother of God," &c.—*See Romish Missal.*

tempted to smile at this, if it were not rather matter for sadness. Is it not lamentable to find human beings, endowed with the gift of reason, fancying that such evolutions can be acceptable in God's sight? What substantial difference is there between the rosaries of Rome and the praying-cylinder of the Buddhist?

"Be not ye therefore like unto them," is our Lord's injunction. But then, on the other hand, all repetition in prayer is not battology. If our hearts are really with our words, repetition is not vain. The longest prayer is not too long, if it be really prayer, and not babbling. When David prayed, "Give ear unto my words, O Lord; consider my meditation. Hearken unto the voice of my cry, my King and my God; for unto Thee will I pray" (Ps. v. 1, 2); this was not battology, for his heart was in every word. When Daniel pleaded, "O our God, hear the prayer of Thy servant, and his supplications: O my God, incline Thine ear and hear: O Lord, hear: O Lord, forgive: O Lord, hearken and do: defer not, for Thine own sake, O my God" (Dan. ix. 17–19); he did not use vain repetitions: his mouth simply spake out of the abundance of his heart. So, we read of an eminent Christian father, that he continued all night praying, "Lord, let me know Thee: Lord, let me know myself!" And if, as we cannot doubt in his case, the prayer came from the heart, and was the intelligent expression of ardent desires for enlarged spiritual apprehension, it was not to be censured as a vain repetition but to be commended as an acceptable, fervent, and effectual prayer.

To conclude. Our Lord assigns, as a reason for avoiding the errors against which He cautions us, that our Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask Him. This is not intended as a reason for restraining prayer, but as a reason for avoiding ostenta-

tion and much speaking. We pray, not to tell God something that He does not know, but to pour out our hearts before Him, as an expression of our dependence upon Him, and of our hope and confidence in Him. In prayer, therefore, more than in any other religious exercise, we must carefully avoid speaking for speaking's sake. When we are about to pray, we should consider beforehand what we really want; then, whether we have any encouragement from God to ask for that which we desire; then, with hearts full of faith and love, let us ask those things for the sake of Christ, the only Mediator; and when we have asked, humbly and fervently, let us stop. As a rule, theological expositions, however orthodox, and everything savouring of dogma, should be eschewed in prayer. The prayers of some ministers are sermons or treatises; and though this is not now so much the case as formerly, there is still perhaps some of the old leaven occasionally traceable. It may not be possible, in conducting the devotions of others, always to avoid expressions of a formal or doctrinal character, intended to direct and elevate the devotions of those who may be imperfectly acquainted with the true grounds of Christian faith and hope. But as far as possible, at all times, and more especially in private, social, and family prayer, the didactic style should be very sparingly employed. Let our prayers be short, simple, earnest, full of holy unction, breathing the spirit of heaven. So shall they go up before God as incense: so shall they return on wings of fire, laden with blessings and the choicest spiritual gifts, into our own bosom.

## XXII.

## THE LORD'S PRAYER.

"After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name."—MATT. vi. 9.

THE LORD'S PRAYER, that most blessed form of words which the Lord Jesus Himself taught His disciples, now claims our attention. From their infancy Christians are made familiar with this prayer; and not a few, even of those otherwise hostile to forms, repeat this form every day of their lives —not saying it merely, but praying it, with the spirit and with the understanding also—offering, not the sacrifice of fools, but a sweet-smelling savour.

Before entering upon the exposition of the prayer itself, it will be proper to inquire briefly, What is the right use of this prayer? and, To what extent is it to be taken as a model?

The word "therefore" at once refers us to the instructions contained in the preceding verses, and more immediately to His condemnation of the heathen battology. As though He had said, "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of; and though He bids you pray, yet avoid all unnecessary words and meaningless repetitions, and express the desires of your hearts in short,

simple language, and with sincerity, gravity, and fervour, after the following example."

It is manifestly a gross abuse of this form of prayer to suppose that it has any virtue as such, or that the mere repetition of it has any efficacy. Yet this very abuse has been, and is, one of the sins of a great part of nominal Christendom. The "Pater Noster," as the prayer has been called, from the two first words of it in the Latin version, is a formula of devotion prescribed by the Church of Rome, in common with the Ave Maria, or Hail Mary, to be repeated a certain number of times, generally in Latin, for every possible occasion, like the "*Aum Mani Pani Aum*" of the Thibetan Buddhists. So many *paters*, so many *aves*, so many *credos* (repetitions of the Apostles' Creed) are often prescribed as a penance, and otherwise are accounted as works of supererogation, efficaciously meritorious, and entitling the reciter to the remission of so many years of purgatory. The very words *pater* and *noster*, in consequence of the ignorant and irreverent use of them which such teaching was sure to induce, have been incorporated into our slang language. "Patter" and "patterizing" are terms commonly applied to the oft-repeated addresses of street-sellers and mendicants, and indeed to any long-winded speeches; and the long use of the Paternoster as a specific in times of distress or anxiety suggested "nostrum" as a generic term for the pretended remedies of empirics.

Another and even grosser variety of this abuse is the use of the Lord's Prayer, in a written form, as an amulet or charm worn upon the person as a protection from danger. The phylacteries of the Pharisees were used in this way. They consisted of small strips of parchment inscribed with a sentence of the law, and enclosed in a small leathern case, which they bound with straps upon their foreheads and upon their arms while engaged in

their devotions. Many devout Jews continue to use them to this day. The practice arose from a superstitious interpretation of that part of the law of Moses which enjoined the children of Israel to bind the commandments as a sign upon their hands, and as frontlets between their eyes (Deut. vi. 8). Hence these strips of parchment became invested with mysterious virtues, and were esteemed as protections against evil spirits, the word "phylactery" signifying a *guard* or *preventive*. Precisely in a similar manner superstitious Christians have used the Lord's Prayer, and other sentences of Scripture. There is an order in the Church of Rome, called the Order of the Blessed Scapular, the members of which wear two square pieces of doubled cloth or stuff, joined together by a long ribbon, hung over one shoulder. (Hence the name, from *scapula*, the shoulder-blade.) Between the folds of each piece of cloth is inserted a slip of parchment, inscribed with a sentence of Scripture; and the whole apparatus, when blessed by a priest, is believed to be a most effectual phylactery. The pamphlets, bearing the *imprimatur* of eminent Romish prelates, and recommending the purchase of these blessed rags, are openly circulated in every part of the world, and contain a long list of miracles alleged to have been wrought by them.

Protestants are tempted to smile at these profane and old wives' fables; they wonder at the credulity of a mother who hangs a "gospel" or a "paternoster" in a silk bag round her son's neck before he leaves home; and, indeed, we may well wonder and weep, when we think of immortal souls blinded by such egregious and transparent delusions. Let those, however, who think severely of these Jewish and Popish superstitions, and deride those who are ensnared by them, examine themselves, whether they, by the habitual and formal utter-

ing of the Lord's Prayer, or any other devotional formula, as a mere bodily exercise, have not been substantially guilty of the same error. For them that sit in darkness, for them that are ignorant and out of the way, there is at least this palliation, that they know no better; but what excuse can be pleaded for the cold, haughty, stiff-necked formalist, who knows his Lord's will, and yet does it not; who mocks the God of heaven with vain oblations, and uses those sacred words, which the meek and lowly Jesus hath taught us, merely to swell the number or volume of his prayers, and fill up the dreary routine of his outward worship?

Rejecting, then, the formal and superstitious use of the Lord's Prayer, as though it, or any mere form of words, had any efficacy in itself, it is nevertheless true that many really pious and spiritually-minded Christians have rushed to the opposite extreme. Because this prayer is often repeated without understanding, and without devotional feeling, some have hastily concluded that it ought not to be used at all; and what is of more consequence, have not duly regarded the instruction which, as a model, it was designed to convey. In the Puritan days, and, indeed, much later, our godly forefathers, to whom we owe so much, and whose names we justly hold in high honour, but who, being human, were not perfect, fell into these errors. Their prayers were much too long, from half an hour to an hour being frequently allotted to the first prayer in their public worship, while the Lord's Prayer was seldom used at all, or merely brought in occasionally at the close of another prayer. The Book of Common Prayer appoints the Lord's Prayer to be used frequently during the same diet of worship. In the ordinary morning service of the Church of England, which is a combination of several services anciently performed at different hours, it is repeated

four or five times. This has the appearance at least of unnecessary repetition; but the proper remedy is, not to exclude it altogether, but to use it less frequently, and above all, to keep it constantly in view as an example for other prayers. Our Lord not only says, "After this manner pray ye," but also, on another occasion, when His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray, says, "When ye pray, say, Our Father," &c. (Luke xi. 2). It is not necessary to interpret this, as some divines have done, to mean that we should never pray without using this form, which is the principle on which all the occasional services of the Church of England have been compiled; but our Lord's words do seem to imply that it ought to be used occasionally as a form of prayer;* and accordingly, in the religious worship of almost all Christian denominations, it is now used, once at least, every Lord's-day. It is unnecessary to add that, when used, it should be used with intelligence, reverence, and faith, as the expression of earnest spiritual affections, and not merely as a part of the public ritual; that, in short, the Lord's Prayer should not be merely said, but prayed, whether in our public or private devotions.

It remains to be observed, that the Lord's Prayer is a perfect guide in the selection of topics for prayer, and in assigning to the several topics their relative place and importance. A careful examination of this prayer, with the help of God's Holy Spirit, will supply us with the

* Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 187. The most suitable time for the use of the Lord's Prayer in public worship seems to be immediately before the sermon; and holy reverence for its Divine Author would indicate that, when used, it should be used alone, and not merely as a peroration to a human composition. The manner in which some ministers use the Lord's Prayer is calculated to convey the impression that, in the judgment of these ministers, our Lord left something unsaid, which they undertake to supply

highest instruction, both as to what we ought to pray for, and how we ought to pray.

The prayer consists of eight parts, which are usually distinguished as the Preface, the Six Petitions, and the Conclusion or Doxology, this latter part being omitted from the formula in S. Luke's Gospel. With respect to the order of the petitions, it may suffice for the present to remark that, of the six, three are petitions relating to the glory of God; that of the remaining three, one relates to our temporal wants, and is placed first in order; and that the other two petitions include all our spiritual wants—all things pertaining to life and godliness, as well as our final victory and triumph. It is impossible to imagine anything more compendious, and at the same time more comprehensive. Each part of this prayer is in fact a sort of capitular title, or general expression, for a large class of subjects; and probably it will be found that there is nothing for which a Christian ought to pray which may not be included under one or other of these heads.

Its conciseness and its fulness are not, however, its only excellences. This prayer is in itself one of the sweetest evidences we have of the communion of saints, and is a direct means of realizing the enjoyment of that communion. It is a most elevating, strengthening, and purifying thought, that in using this prayer aright we are uttering the very words of the Saviour Himself; words which have formed the devotional utterances of the holy Apostles, and of the noble army of martyrs, whose spirits, now made perfect in holiness, and purged from all impurity, are able to sympathize with the conflicts and prayers of their brethren whose warfare on earth is not yet accomplished. With them, while pouring out our hearts unto Him who is their Father and our Father, their God and our God, we may hold a real

and a most blessed fellowship, by the all-pervading energy of the Holy Spirit, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, and who is the Lord and Giver of life unto the whole spiritual body of Christ. The prayers of the saints militant do thus commingle with the prayers of the saints in paradise, and fill with richest odours those golden vials which are offered before the eternal throne (Rev. v. 8).

The PREFACE to the Lord's Prayer is, "OUR FATHER WHICH ART IN HEAVEN."

We are taught to approach God as a Father. And this suggests several important considerations.

It implies that we are *the offspring of God.* We derive our existence, in a certain sense, from our earthly parents; but life is nevertheless the direct and immediate gift of God to every living being, animal or vegetable. Life is transmitted naturally from father to son; but this very transmission is effected by the power of God, whose sole prerogative it is to quicken the dead, and to call things that are not as though they were (Rom. iv. 17). Besides, this transmission of life from one generation to another cannot have been eternal: it must have had a beginning, and it shall have an end. The progenitor of the whole human race, it cannot be denied, must have received his life from God; and as every human being was in the loins of the common ancestor in the day when God made him in all the strength and beauty of adult manhood, it is an inevitable truth that we are all the offspring of God. "It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves" (Ps. c. 3). We have fathers according to the flesh, and we do them reverence; but it is by God that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. His eyes did see our substance yet being unperfect; and in His book all our members were

written, and fashioned in continuance (continuous design) when as yet there was none of them (Ps. cxxxix. 16.) He is not only the Framer of our bodies, but He is also the Father of our spirits. He breathes into our nostrils the breath of life, and makes us living souls. Even the heathen, though they worshipped gods many and lords many, yet acknowledged a great original and universal *Numen*, in whom all men lived, and moved, and had their being. It was from two heathen poets that S. Paul, in his discourse to the refined and subtile Athenians, quoted the words, "For we are also His offspring"* (Acts xvii. 28).

In addressing God by the title of "Father," we acknowledge our *dependence* upon Him. The life that He gave He alone is able to preserve. Food, raiment, fire, water, air, all the necessaries of life, are means to be employed for our sustenance; but it is from God that these material substances derive their qualities, and it is only by His blessing that any of them are made efficacious.

"Dependence" implies *protection;* and our being taught to address God as a Father implies a promise of protection. A father protects his children through the helpless years of infancy and childhood, and the child when he becomes a man is able to dispense with the father's watchful eye and guardian hand; but with respect to God we are all our lives helpless children. A thousand dangers surround us, of most of which we are ignorant, or if not ignorant, unmindful. Any one of the noxious agents constantly in operation, or ready to be set in operation in a moment, upon, above, or under the surface of the earth, may injure or destroy life, limb, or

* The words occur in the "Phænomena" of Aratus (B.C. 270), of which only a fragment remains. Similar words occur in Kleanthes' Hymn to Zeus. It is to these, probably, that the Apostle refers; though equivalent expressions are found in other heathen poets.

reason, and instantaneously snap asunder that slender thread which separates us from the invisible world. It is God alone that holdeth our souls in life, that keepeth our eyes from tears, and our feet from falling. It is He alone that determines the time when any of us enters on this busy stage, and He alone can say, when we have done and suffered all His will concerning us, "Return, ye children of men" (Ps. xc. 3).

That we are taught to address God as a Father, suggests also the idea of *future provision.* A good father not only supports and protects his children, but also provides for their future. So God not only gives us all things necessary for this present life, but also provides for us an inheritance in the life that is to come, which He hath revealed in His Word. All His dealings with men in this world have a reference, if rightly apprehended, to a future state, for which our present brief span of existence is only a preparation—the *larva* of the future IMAGO.

In approaching God as a Father, therefore, we ought to feel inspired with *filial reverence and confidence.* When we, poor, weak, frail, dependent creatures, attempt to raise our eyes and thoughts to the infinitely wise, holy, and powerful Creator, we cannot but feel the immeasurable distance which separates us from Him. We are tempted to say, Will God that dwelleth on high indeed humble Himself to behold things that are in the earth? But it is not enough that we are repeatedly assured of His condescension (Ps. xi. 4; cxiii. 5, 6; Matt. x. 29–31); it is this God, the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, that bids us call Him "Father." It is He, even He, that encourages us, the ungrateful and rebellious race of Adam, to draw near to Him, as children to a kind and tender father, knowing that He is both able and ready to help us, and

with full assurance that we shall not approach Him in vain.

We are taught to address God, however, not simply as "Father," but as "OUR FATHER." Natural religion itself teaches us that we are the offspring of God. The very heathen—the devils themselves—believe this. Natural religion teaches us also that we have offended our Almighty Creator and Parent, and that we are alienated from Him, and become His enemies by wicked works. But here the capabilities of natural religion are exhausted. Neither reason nor conscience, however powerful to condemn us as sinners, is able to discover how the condemnation is to be removed, and the sinner reconciled to the Lawgiver whom he has defied. This God alone is able to reveal; and this He has revealed in the Gospel of His Son. It was to achieve this work of reconciliation that God sent His Son into the world. And when that Son, as the authoritative expounder of His Father's will, taught His disciples to say "Our Father," He gave them a pledge that the work should be completed, and that the door of mercy should be opened wide, that if any man would, he might enter and be saved.

The man who calls God "Our Father," therefore, *claims the promises of God through Jesus Christ.* This is "the contrite sinner's voice, returning from his ways." It is the voice of simple faith, saying, "Lord, I believe." For it is through Christ alone that we have access by the Spirit unto the Father (Eph. ii. 18). In our natural state we are under bondage to the law: our hope of eternal life, if we had any, rested upon our own obedience, which we knew to be imperfect, and which could not therefore avail us. But through Christ we have received power to break this bondage, and have received

the Spirit of adoption, whereby we are no longer slaves, but are made sons, and are privileged to cry "ABBA!"* There is a manifest distinction between the sense in which God is called "Father," as being the Creator of all things, and the far higher sense in which He is the Father of those who are His sons in Christ. Creation is not, in the strict sense, paternity; nor is the relationship which subsists between Creator and creature strictly the same as that which subsists between father and son. In the highest and noblest sense, we are "sons of God" only when we are begotten of Him in Christ; and though it is true that, with reference to the covenant of grace, believers are chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. i. 4), yet in actual experience they become "sons" only when they are united to Christ by faith—when they are made one with Him as He is one with the Father—and are thus enabled to say, not in a figure of speech, but as true sons, "Our Father."

In addressing God then as "Our Father," we claim a real brotherhood with Christ, and through Him a real Divine sonship. And it is a simple but necessary consequence of these exalted relationships, that they who are by grace admitted to them should joyfully receive and love as brethren all that have received the like grace by the same faith. "Our Father" is the language, not only of filiation towards God, but also of human fra-

* ABBA—a Syro-Chaldaic word, signifying *Father*. Alford thinks that "Father" is not added to "Abba" merely as an equivalent translation, but that both terms were used (Notes on Mark xiv. 36; Rom. viii. 15; Gal. iv. 6). Luther, in Mark, translates the whole expression, "Abba, mein Vater;" and in Romans and Galatians, "Abba, Lieber Vater." Calmet and others state, on Rabbinical authority, that while *Abba* and *Imma* (mother) were titles by which all the *free* members of a household were permitted to address the heads of the family, *slaves* were on no account suffered to use those titles. The believer is no longer the slave of the Law, but is made free, and invested with the privileges of a son, so that he is entitled to say "Abba!"

ternity. If by faith we are made brethren of Christ, and so children and heirs of God, we become by the same investiture brethren of the whole household of faith. "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself" (Rom. xiv. 7). No Christian has any right to regard himself as an isolated individual. No creature, indeed, animate or inanimate, was made for itself, and thus none stands alone, but has necessarily relations to other creatures. In an inferior sense, therefore, and with reference to the natural and moral government of God over all His creatures and all their actions, "Our Father" may be used as meaning "Father of all created things." This, indeed, is the popular acceptation of the expression; and the natural man is incapable of apprehending, experimentally, any higher meaning.* But if all creatures are in a natural sense God's family, in how much higher a sense are they His family who are truly born of Him by the Holy Spirit! We that have believed are all brethren in Christ—members of His body—and therefore all members one of another. In the spirit of this true Christian brotherhood we are taught to look with earnest sympathy upon all mankind, and while loving "the brotherhood," to "honour all men." "Our Father" teaches us to look upon the whole family as bound to us by a common tie of origin, a tie which we ought to seek to strengthen into the closer and dearer bond of Christian brotherhood. These two words, "Our Father," are a condemnation of all oppression and tyranny amongst men, and of all unkindness and indifference to human want and suffering.

* The ZEUS of the Greeks, JUPITER of the Romans, and THOR of the Scandinavians, were all invoked as "Father." In Pope's "Universal Prayer" we find "Jove" and "Jehovah" used as equivalent titles of the great "Father of all." How many nominal Christians, like the Athenians, ignorantly inscribe upon their altars, "To the unknown God!"

Most especially, however, is "Our Father" the expression of that large-hearted Christian catholicity which teaches us to pray *with* others, as well as *for* them. What a reproof is here of that spirit of rivalry and jealousy which has been the reproach of the Christian name from the very beginning of the Gospel! If Christians had prayed this prayer instead of saying it, we should not have had so many sects in the Visible Church, each excommunicating and fulminating anathemas against the others. May the day soon come when Christians shall better uuderstand what manner of spirit they are of, and shall be able to say with one heart and one voice, "Our Father!"

Finally, we are taught to pray to God as "Our Father which art in heaven." This qualifying phrase is not added merely to remind us of the distinction between our earthly parents and our Heavenly Father, nor is it intended to convey the idea that God dwells in heaven rather than in earth. He fills the universe of space, earth not less than heaven, with His presence. But we are hereby reminded of the sovereign power, the universal authority, the majesty, the inscrutable wisdom of the God we worship, who is of heaven, heavenly, even as we are of the earth, earthy. And inasmuch as heaven is a state of perfect holiness and happiness, it teaches us that these blessings, which all sincere worshippers desire, are to be found only in the presence of God. This phrase, therefore, "instructs us to come before God with deep humility and adoring reverence of His majesty and condescension; with abstraction of mind from external objects and carnal imaginations; with spiritual desires and large expectations; and aspiring to the purity and felicity of His heavenly worshippers." *

* Scott's Commentary, *in loco.*

The FIRST PETITION of the Lord's Prayer is "HALLOWED BE THY NAME."

The term "hallowed" properly means *sanctified* or *made holy*. The term "sanctify," however, like the kindred term "glorify," is used in different senses, as applied to God and to His creatures. We cannot make God holy, neither can we make Him glorious, nor can we add in any degree either to His holiness or to His glory, for these are inherently and eternally parts of Himself. We can glorify God only by declaring His glory. "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Ps. xix. 1). "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me" (Ps. l. 23). These are inspired definitions of the term "glorify," as applied to God; and they will help us to a definition of the terms "hallow" and "sanctify," which must be understood to mean, not *to make God holy*, but *to declare His holiness*, and to hold His name in the highest reverence and honour. "Who is like unto Thee, O Jehovah, among the gods? who is like Thee, glorious in holiness?" (Exod. xv. 11.) The seraphim that stand around His throne cover their faces with their wings, and cry one to another, "Holy, holy, holy is Jehovah of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isa. vi. 3). And in humble imitation of these celestial intelligences, we children of men, who have so largely experienced His goodness, are encouraged to draw near: "Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness" (Ps. xxx. 4). In this petition, therefore, we pray that God's name may be hallowed, or regarded as holy, and held in esteem and veneration everywhere and at all times.

What then are we to understand by the "Name" of God?

Obviously something more is intended than the name or names of God, considered simply as titles or appella-

tions; though these are of course included. The Jews had, and still have, a superstitious reverence for the name "Jehovah" above all the other names of God, that being the name by which He was specifically known as the God of Israel, in contradistinction to the false gods of other nations. It was one of their corrupt traditions that oaths sworn by the ordinary names of God were less binding than oaths sworn by the name "Jehovah," and that, consequently, the violation of these inferior oaths involved a less degree of guilt.* They also hold it unlawful to tread upon a piece of written paper or parchment, lest the name "Jehovah" should perchance be written on it. Their scribes, in copying the manuscripts of the sacred books, pronounced audibly every other word before writing it, but when they came to the name of "Jehovah" they merely formed it with their lips, and were required to take a clean pen before writing it.† This sort of outward reverence for any name of God, simply as a name, is little better than superstition. But we are not to go to the opposite extreme, and say that all reverence for the names or titles of God, even though it be only external, is necessarily superstitious. And it is certain that nothing is more inconsistent with a holy walk and conversation, and a more conclusive evidence of an irreligious temper of mind, than the careless or irreverent use of any name or title of God.

The "name" of God, however, has here a much more extensive signification. A name is that by which any person or thing is distinguished from other persons or things; and hence we understand by the "name of God" anything whereby God maketh Himself known.

* See above, pp. 211, 212.

† In the same way some sects of Buddhists deem it unlawful to pronounce the name "Aum" audibly, and merely form it with their lips.

It includes all His attributes, all His ordinances, all His works, and, above all, His Word. The Psalmist says, "Thou hast magnified Thy Word above all Thy name" (Ps. cxxxviii. 2); that is, however illustriously God has displayed His perfections in His works, He has displayed them still more illustriously in His Word.

Our prayer therefore is, that God would dispose and enable us and all men to entertain the most enlightened and profound veneration for everything whereby His character and purposes are declared; that we may worship Him, not according to our own fancies or predilections, but only in such ways as He hath Himself appointed; and that we may give our undivided allegiance and affection to Him alone. This is a prayer against all infidelity and false religion. The infidel, if He does not actually deny the existence of God, rejects His Word, and refuses to observe His ordinances. False religions teach men either to worship false gods, or to worship the true God in a forbidden manner, by means of images, or through spurious mediators. Well may the Church, still militant on earth, pray with one heart and soul that God, in His own good time and way, would cause these abominations to cease, and bring all men to worship Him in the beauty of holiness: that He would bless the means employed for making known the truth: and order all things for the ultimate triumph of pure and undefiled religion.

In conclusion: as Christians, we can scarcely exclude from the ideas suggested by this petition, that the right hallowing of the name of God implies a recognition of the cardinal doctrine of the Trinity. The name of the God we worship is "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost" (Matt. xxviii. 19). This is one name, not three names. Into this name we are baptized; and this name is the name concerning which we pray that it may be univer-

sally had in reverence from the rising to the setting of the sun. While offering this petition, therefore, it becomes us to raise our hearts to God, not only as He is our Creator and Preserver, but also as He is our reconciled Father; and to do this aright, we must approach Him through the sole mediation of Him who is one with the Father, who is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His substance (Heb. i. 3); and who, with the Father and the Eternal Spirit, liveth and reigneth, ever one God, world without end.

If we rightly apprehend these things, and lay them up in our hearts, we shall be better prepared to worship God in spirit and in truth, and shall be better able to pray, saying, "OUR FATHER WHICH ART IN HEAVEN; HALLOWED BE THY NAME!"

## XXIII.

## THE LORD'S PRAYER—(*continued*).

"Thy kingdom come."—MATT. vi. 10.

THE SECOND PETITION of the Lord's Prayer is "THY KINGDOM COME!" And bearing in mind what has already been said, it will be found that this second petition is substantially a prayer for the complete accomplishment of the blessings and triumphs contemplated in the first. If we pray that God's name may be "hallowed;" that the most enlightened and profound veneration may be universally cherished for everything whereby God maketh Himself known; that men may worship Him everywhere, not according to their own vain imaginations, but with incense and a pure offering (Mal. i. 11); if we beseech Him to put a perpetual end to all infidelity and false religion, and to order all things for the ultimate triumph of truth and holiness; if we thus pray, with a single eye to the glory of God's great and ever-blessed name, the name which, as Christians, we especially reverence, the name of "FATHER, SON, AND HOLY GHOST," —it is evident that in praying that God's kingdom may come, we pray for the full realization and consummation of the former prayer; for it is only in the kingdom of God, the kingdom in which He is acknowledged as alone entitled to the allegiance of all hearts, that His name is,

or can be, rightly hallowed. Such, and so great, is the subject brought before us in this petition.

The phrase "kingdom of God," or "kingdom of heaven" (this latter form being peculiar to S. Matthew), is used in the New Testament, and especially in our Lord's parables, to signify the Visible Church, or the entire body of professing Christians, who are represented as a mixed company, consisting of wheat and darnel, good fish and bad, wise and foolish virgins, faithful and slothful servants, sheep and goats, and so forth. Such, however, cannot be the meaning of "Thy kingdom" in this petition; for in this sense the kingdom of God has already come, or rather has always been in existence since the days of Cain and Abel, the archetypes respectively of false and true worshippers. And yet, as if to prove the truth of the saying, that there is no opinion so extravagant but some philosopher or other will be found to defend it, there have been found divines who have maintained that the Visible Church, and that alone, is the "kingdom" for which our Lord taught His disciples to pray. They refer to the memorable sentence with which both John the Baptist and our Lord Himself commenced their respective ministries, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. iii. 2, iv. 17). When the twelve Apostles were first sent forth to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, they were commanded to make the same announcement (Matt. x. 7). And these writers interpret the phrase "kingdom of heaven" to mean the establishment of the Visible Church of Christ, in contradistinction to the Jewish Church. Accordingly, they suppose that our Lord intended this prayer to be used only during the earlier days of the Christian dispensation; that it was virtually answered on the day of Pentecost, and more fully when the

Church had been planted in all the centres of population in the known world, after which the prayer was no longer necessary. It is sufficient to observe, with respect to this theory, that it is purely gratuitous, having no support whatever from any intimation of our Lord, but rather the contrary (see Matt. xxviii. 20; John xiv. 26); though it may be admitted that neither in the Acts of the Apostles, nor in any Christian father before the third century, is any allusion to the use of the prayer to be found, which seems fatal to the opinion that it was invariably and *liturgically* used in the Church from the beginning.* The truth is, that the application of the phrase "kingdom of heaven" to the Visible Church is altogether secondary and subordinate, and derives all its force from the more important significations which the phrase ordinarily bears, and to which it must be restricted in this petition.

"Thy kingdom," as an object of Christian desire and prayer, can only mean either the kingdom of grace or the kingdom of glory.

The "kingdom of grace" is the kingdom which God, by the power of His Holy Spirit, sets up in the hearts of men. The Pharisees demanded of our Lord "when

* Alford confesses "that we find very few traces of such use in early times," and quotes (from Tholuck) the testimony of Justin Martyr, who flourished in the latter part of the second century, and who, in his "Apology," describing the Christian worship (concerning which the heathen had invented the most atrocious calumnies), makes no mention of the Lord's Prayer, or of any liturgical forms as being then in use, but states, on the contrary, that he who offered prayer and thanksgiving in the congregation uttered them *to the best of his ability* (ὅση δύναμις αὐτῷ). The Dean, again quoting from Tholuck, also reminds us that the *first mention* of the Lord's Prayer by any Christian father is by Tertullian and his contemporary Cyprian (third century), who speaks of it as "oratio legitima et ordinaria" (Notes on Matt. vi. 9). Yet, somewhat inconsistently, the Dean subsequently asks, "If the Apostolic Church did not use the Lord's prayer as a form, when did its use begin?" (Notes on Luke xi. 1.)

the kingdom of God should come;" to which He replied, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or, Lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you"* (Luke xvii. 20, 21). The Pharisees, and, indeed, the Jews generally, expected in the Messiah a temporal prince, who should restore the sceptre to Judah, and advance the nation to eminence and dominion over all earthly kingdoms. Our Lord, in the passage just quoted, appears to have designed to correct these carnal notions, and to direct their attention to the necessity of becoming subjects of Divine grace, without which they could never be admitted into Messiah's kingdom, which is "the kingdom of glory." This is that kingdom to which all the prophecies have reference, and in which alone they shall finally be fulfilled: this is that kingdom of glory which shall be established upon the earth, when the kingdoms of this world shall have become the kingdom of our Lord and of His anointed; and He shall reign for ever and ever (Rev. xi. 15). Not until this grand consummation shall have arrived, shall this petition cease to be the prayer of Christ's people.

It is evident that the future establishment of the kingdom of glory implies the previous establishment of the

* Alford translates παρατήρησις "*anticipation*," or "observation." The idea is that of "watching with a carnal mind, and with carnal expectations" (comp. Luke xiv. 1). For "within you," the Dean proposes (with Bloomfield) to translate "(already) among you," or "in the midst of you," taking ἐντὸς ὑμῶν as equivalent to μέσος ὑμῶν (John i. 26), or to ἐν ὑμῖν. The remarks of these critics are not without weight; but on the whole, the received translation appears more in harmony with our Lord's subsequent prophecy, which, though addressed specially to the disciples, was in the hearing of the Pharisees. The error of the latter was not in supposing that the kingdom of God was to *appear*, but in supposing that it was *immediately* to appear (Luke xix. 11). Of course, our Lord did not assert that the kingdom of God was in the hearts of the Pharisees. He spoke generally, meaning "within the hearts of men."

kingdom of grace in the hearts of men. They are not, indeed, two kingdoms, but one and the same kingdom in different stages of development. "Grace," says an old writer, "is glory militant; glory is grace triumphant." The cross and the conflict must needs go before the crown; the believer's consolation is that the crown shall certainly follow the cross and the conflict. At present, though this earth is the kingdom of God *de jure*, it is not His kingdom *de facto*. It has fallen into the grasp of a foul usurper, who is called "the god of this world;" and the world itself is called the kingdom of Satan, and his power "the power of darkness" (2 Cor. iv. 4; Matt. xii. 26; Luke xxii. 53; Col. i. 13. Comp. Eph. ii. 2; v. 11; vi. 12; 1 John ii. 11). The establishment of God's kingdom implies, therefore, the overthrow of all God's enemies, who are included under the general designation of Satan's kingdom.

The DESTRUCTION OF SATAN'S KINGDOM is accordingly the *first* thing contemplated in this petition. This world is at present the kingdom of Satan. That great enemy of God and man spake only the truth when, in his temptation of our Lord, he showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said, "All this power will I give Thee, and the glory of them, for that is delivered unto me;" though he lied when he added, "and to whomsoever I will I give it" (Luke iv. 6). It is true that God has for a season delivered the world into the power of Satan, whom He suffers to go up and down in it, tempting and deceiving men everywhere; but it is not true that he has any power beyond what God permits him to exercise; it is not true that he can go one inch beyond the length of his chain, or that he can prevail against men, or dispose of earthly pleasures or possessions, otherwise than as God Himself permits

and appoints. So long, therefore, as Satan continues to exercise his malignant influence in the world, this prayer will be necessary and appropriate; for salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, cannot "come," in the full sense of the word, until the "accuser of the brethren" shall have been cast down and overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of the testimony of God (Rev. xii. 10, 11).

Satan's kingdom consists in *the power of sin amongst men.* Sin is, essentially, rebellion against God; the giving to a usurper that loyalty and obedience which are due to the legitimate Sovereign alone. When our first parents hearkened unto the voice of the tempter, they in effect renounced the authority of God, and subjected themselves, with all their unborn posterity, to the yoke of the tyrant. Thus this world became the kingdom of darkness, and the heart of man the palace of Satan, which he, as a strong man armed, keeps until it is taken from him by One stronger than he (Luke xi. 21, 22).

And it is no vain or intrusive speculation, but strictly within the province of legitimate inquiry, to ask, Why was this usurpation permitted? It is not indeed for us, in our present state of childhood, to babble of things that belong to a state of maturity. But it is nevertheless plain, from the Word of God itself, that Satan's kingdom was not set up without God's permission and appointment. It is not true, as some Arminian writers have not scrupled to assert, that the usurpation of Satan and the fall of man had the effect of thwarting and frustrating the benevolent designs of God.* It is not true that

* See, for example, a prize essay, by Rev. John Harris, entitled "Mammon," published in 1836. The writer says (p. 4)—"Had His (God's) great idea been realized, the world would have exhibited the glorious spectacle of a whole race in family compact. . . . But the awful invasion of sin frustrated the Divine intention, destroyed it even in its

the scheme of redemption was an after-thought, an expedient rendered necessary by the failure of God's original intention, which Satan, one of God's creatures, had defeated. The temptation and fall of man were, on the contrary, essential parts of God's one grand, wise, holy, and eternal purpose, namely, the demonstration of His own glory in the sight of a universe which He willed to create. God's glory in His HOLINESS. The triumph of holiness is the demonstration of the glory of God. And the occasion and opportunity for such a demonstration was provided by the introduction of moral evil into the universe, first by the fall of angels, and afterwards by the fall of man. By the introduction of moral evil, or sin, into the world, God designed to demonstrate to all created intelligences that the happiness of the creature was bound up in his obedience to the law of the Creator. Nothing could so thoroughly and effectually convince God's creatures, whether angels or men, of the evil of sin, as the actual exposure and exhibition of its true character and consequences; and nothing could so illustriously vindicate the power, holiness, and love of God, as the redemption of the sinner and the sufferer from the grievous bondage and misery into which he had fallen. It is therefore quite within the limits of revealed truth to say that God not simply permitted, but appointed, our bondage, and the consequent subjection * of the inferior creatures to vanity (Rom. viii. 20), in order that His own glory might be supereminently illustrated in the work of redemption. Light is best understood and appreciated when it has been contrasted with darkness; health is most valued

type and model" (p. 6). What may be meant by the type and model of an intention it would be hazardous to conjecture.

* The use of the verb *ὑποτάσσω* by the Apostle clearly makes this subjection the appointment of God.

when it is restored after long and severe sickness; food and fire are never so acceptable as when we have long suffered from privation and exposure. It was to provide for the elaborate exhibition of such a contrast, with every possible variety of circumstances and details, that God delivered up the world He had made, for a period limited by His eternal purpose, into the power of Satan, by whose fell contrivance sin and death entered through the disobedience of our common progenitors; and thus our whole race has been, and must yet for a short space (Rev. xii. 12) continue, covered by a cloud of darkness and of the shadow of death.

Such is Satan's kingdom; and there is nothing inconsistent with the character of God in such a method of executing His decrees. But we must guard against partial views in so weighty a subject. We must look at the whole; at the end as well as at the beginning. God's purpose was not to exhibit a part of His character, but to demonstrate the harmony of the whole. And accordingly, in the attributes which constitute His character, we find the most solemn pledge that the usurpation of Satan shall be of limited duration. His overthrow is designated and guaranteed from the very beginning of our history as a fallen race. The judicial sentence pronounced against man for the "first disobedience" was accompanied with a promise, which decreed that the head of the great calumniator should be bruised by that seed, which he might, indeed, oppress and humiliate, but which he should not be able to destroy. From the time of the Fall, therefore, there have been two great divisions of the human race, the enmity which God had ordained between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent being first developed in the two that were first born of woman, and having continued with increasing intensity through all

succeeding generations. The Church, and the world; the children of the kingdom or of the promise, and the children of disobedience or of the wicked one; the sons of God, and the sons of Belial; the servants of righteousness, and the servants of sin: such are the respective designations of these two classes of mankind. The Bible is the history of the war that has been waged between these two seeds: the scheme of redemption is described as a spoiling of the principalities and powers of darkness: the end of all is victory, glory, immortality, eternal and unspeakable joy, to them that overcome.

For no event, therefore, can we pray with more entire assurance of faith than for the destruction of Satan's kingdom. God, that cannot lie, hath promised and determined it: the course of Divine providence is most evidently tending towards it: every motion of the Holy Spirit in our own souls is a separate and direct effort for the same end. Blessed therefore are they who are diligently, valiantly, and patiently fighting on the Lord's side in this great war, of which the issue is so certain! To fight this good fight of faith it is not necessary that every Christian should gird upon him the weapons of controversy; still less that any should assume the prohibited weapons of carnal warfare. But every Christian can and ought to fight against the world and the flesh, which are the devil's chief agents, in his daily walk and conversation, and above all in his closet, on his knees. Prayer, the mightiest of all weapons to the pulling down of the enemy's strongholds, may be wielded by the lowliest disciple; yea, it often is wielded with signal effect by many a stripling warrior, who has made no proof of the armour of Saul, and trusts neither to the strength nor the skill of the arm of flesh. Fervent prayer is like the stone from David's sling, which, hurled by the arm

of faith, bruises the head of the giant adversary even unto death.

The *second* thing contemplated in this petition is the means by which Satan's kingdom is to be destroyed, or THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF GRACE.

All men being by nature, that is, by reason of their natural descent from Adam, subjects of Satan's kingdom, children of disobedience, and children of wrath, the destruction of Satan's kingdom in the world implies its destruction in the hearts of individual men. All men come into this world on equal terms in this respect—all are alike sinners and heirs of condemnation. And to all alike salvation is proclaimed through the perfect righteousness and expiatory sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the author of spiritual and eternal life to all them that obey Him (Heb. v. 9). The communication of this spiritual and eternal life to any individual man is, however, the act of God's sovereign grace alone: all that any man can do is to consent and submit to God's terms; and even this consent and submission he cannot yield unless he be disposed and enabled thereto by the Holy Spirit. When any man is thus inwardly called by the grace of God, and is enabled by the same grace to obey the call, he is "born again;" and he does in truth receive a new spiritual life, entirely distinct from the natural life which he derived from his natural parents, for it is a life derived from Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. By this new spiritual birth we are for ever emancipated from the bondage of Satan, and translated from his kingdom into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col. i. 13). This is that kingdom of Christ which "is not of this world" (John xviii. 36), and which "cometh not with observation;" which is not distinguished by the insignia of earthly kingdoms, and there-

fore is not discernible by the carnal eye, nor understood by the carnal mind.

The kingdom of grace is thus advanced, and the kingdom of Satan correspondingly weakened, whenever any man is by divine grace led to repent of his sins, and to lay hold by faith of that precious gift of eternal life which Christ hath purchased for us by His own blood. This is the simple meaning of "conversion," a term much misunderstood and abused; a term which, scripturally interpreted, includes not merely an outward reformation of life, or abandonment of vicious habits, but a radical change of heart, the subjection of the whole man to the obedience of Christ.

In this view, "Thy kingdom come" is a prayer for the conversion of sinners. We pray that God, who has graciously promised that the whole earth shall be filled with His glory (Num. xiv. 21; Ps. lxxii. 19), would also bless the means which He has Himself appointed for the accomplishment of this end; that He would raise up a constant supply of able, faithful, and zealous men to proclaim His Word and labour for the salvation of souls; that He would give efficacy to the preached Word, and open the hearts of sinners to receive the Gospel tidings; that He would break down in their hearts all the barriers of unbelief, prejudice, and superstition; that He would demolish all the idols which men ignorantly worship, whether in heathen or nominally Christian temples, or "in the chambers of imagery" in their own breasts (Ezek. viii. 12); and that ourselves and others may daily grow in grace and holiness.

Especially, in these days of latitudinarian speculation and noisy sectarian clamour, all that love Jerusalem and her peace have need to pray that God would greatly multiply the number of those who continue steadfast in the truth. It is not they who are most prominent in

the world's view, but they who continue in Christ's word, that are His disciples indeed (John viii. 31). Let it be the earnest prayer, therefore, of all that profess to be His disciples, that they may be enabled to give diligence to make their calling and election sure; and that they may be able to say with the Apostle, in all holy and humble confidence, "I know whom I have believed; and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day" (2 Tim. i. 12). To be able to say this with a true heart, and in full assurance of faith, is no mean attainment, and is the witness of the Spirit that our citizenship is in heaven. And yet, how needful to watch against the deceitfulness of our hearts, lest we should think ourselves something when we are nothing, and so fatally deceive ourselves! (Gal. vi. 3.) Let believers beware of imagining that because God has promised to perform the good work He has begun in them (Phil. i. 6), there is therefore nothing left for them to do, and that they may with impunity lounge upon their beds of ease in Zion, heedless of the roaring lion without, or fearless of the seductive flatteries of the charmer. What if this fancied security should prove delusive! What if, while we have been erecting a lofty and pretentious structure, we have forgotten to dig deep, and lay our foundation upon the rock! What if, after all, we are not truly rooted and grounded in love; not truly built up in Christ! What if we have mistaken, as many do mistake, a warm natural temperament and mere sentimental sympathy for the genuine work of grace! What if the light that is in us be only darkness, or at best a fitful meteoric glare! an earth-born spark, and not a heaven-kindled fire! not the true light of the sun, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day! That we may not thus be deceived—that we may not be dazzled by

glittering tinsel, or mistake "reprobate silver" for the true shekel of the sanctuary—we are commanded to examine ourselves by the fruit we are bringing forth. If the true light be in a man, it must shine, not flashing and flickering, and then fading, but burning steadily and brightly; clouded perhaps at times, but beaming forth again with renewed lustre after the cloud has passed away; and proving, not to himself alone, but to all around, that his light is a reflection of the glory of the Lord.

But in this petition, no doubt, the KINGDOM OF GLORY is the chief end contemplated; and it is, finally, for the coming of this kingdom that we are taught to pray.

The advancement of the kingdom of grace, by the conversion of sinners, by the extension of the Gospel, and by the work of the Spirit in the hearts of God's people, is the means whereby the kingdom of Satan is to be destroyed. The efficient cause of that destruction is, of course, the work of Christ; but in order to develop the whole counsel of God, the same great spiritual battle that was fought on Calvary is fought also in the soul of every man who is rescued from sin and hell, and endowed with the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit. This deliverance and these gifts are freely offered to all men; but it is certain that all men will not accept them. God alone knows who will, and who will not, be saved. His covenant with Christ for the salvation of His people cannot be broken: not one of those who are chosen in Him shall ever perish (John x. 28); and thus the dispensation of grace cannot be closed until the last of Christ's sheep has been brought into the fold. Then, when the precious blood of sprinkling has been applied for the last time, and the return of the last prodigal has awakened for the last time the songs of the angelic

host—then, but not till then, grace shall end, and glory shall begin. During the reign of grace it may be said that the sun has not risen, but is rising; every day the light grows stronger; at this very hour "the signs of the times" are such as to give assurance that we are approaching the consummation of all things; and the all but complete fulfilment of the volume of prophecy encourages us to lift our heads, in the believing conviction that redemption draweth nigh. The Church of God may now pray, not with feeble and remote expectation, but with the ardour of hope that cannot be long deferred, "Thy kingdom come!"

On this part of the subject it becomes poor finite mortals to speak with reverence and humility, and with studious avoidance of anything even remotely allied to enthusiasm. But, at the same time, Christians who believe that God is true ought not to suffer the flippancy of scorners to make them ashamed of their belief. It is not more certain that this world had a beginning, than that it will also have an end. Every man knows this: but the painful fact is, that few regard it. Every man knows that he must die, and that death is to him the end of the world; but thousands, knowing this, are nevertheless living as though they knew it not, and as though the buying and selling, the planting and building, the marrying and giving in marriage, the heaping up of riches, the pageantry of earthly dignities, the music and the dancing, and the sparkling of the overflowing cup, were to continue for ever. There is need, therefore, to cry aloud, even at the risk of provoking a sneer, "The end of all things is at hand!"

It is true that the same thing was said eighteen hundred years ago; nay, the prophets that have been since the world began have in effect proclaimed the same thing; for there was always the same necessity for

living in a state of watchful preparation. Great disservice has been done to the cause of truth and godliness by those who have presumptuously attempted to calculate the time of the end, and to fix the coming of the Lord on a precise date. Much learning and ingenuity has been expended in such calculations; but the time fixed has passed by, and the effect has been, not merely to cover the calculators with ridicule, of which they had no right to complain, but to throw discredit upon all prophetical studies, and to make the ungodly more scornful and confident than ever.

We do not know, we cannot know, we ought not to desire to know, what we are distinctly told is intended to be unknown either by angels or men (Mark xiii. 32). Such knowledge would render nugatory the oft-repeated warnings: "The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night" (1 Thess. v. 2); "Be ye always ready;" "Take ye heed, watch and pray; for ye know not when the time is" (Mark xiii. 33); &c. &c. It is the certainty of the event, and the utter uncertainty of the time of it, that give emphasis to these warnings; and while avoiding the rashness of intruding into the secret things of God (Acts i. 7), let us not suppose that such awful warnings have no meaning, but rather give diligence, lest the Lord when He cometh should find us sleeping. Let us be sober, and watch unto prayer. If we pray daily, "Thy kingdom come," we avouch our belief that the kingdom of God will in fact come, some time or other, and our desire that it should come speedily. Is there, then, anything unreasonable in supposing that this prayer will be heard? May not the charge of fanaticism, so frequently brought against those who have directed their inquiries to these subjects, be fairly retorted upon those who daily offer this prayer, and yet expect no answer to it? Is it more difficult to believe

that Christ shall hereafter appear and *reign* in person, than to believe that He has already appeared and *suffered* in person?

Let not the cry of fanaticism disturb the calm and conscientious inquirer. The very newspapers that in this age of progress scoff at all spiritual religion, and revile the student of prophecy as fit only for a lunatic asylum, themselves record, in the columns of their daily intelligence, the onward march of events which are vindicating the truth of God, and proclaiming to the world that what He by His servants hath signified is surely coming to pass. Wherefore let us not be unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is (Eph. v. 17). Let us redeem the time, for there is much to be done, and but little time for any of us. Let us live as we should wish Him to find us, watching, and waiting, and working! Let brotherly love increase and continue! Let faith be more vigorous, prayer more fervent and importunate! Animated by these sentiments, and cultivating these fruits of the Spirit, we shall thus be able to pray with all our hearts, "THY KINGDOM COME!"

## XXIV.

## THE LORD'S PRAYER—(*continued*).

"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."—MATT. vi. 10.

KNOWLEDGE of God's WILL, accompanied by active obedience and patient submission thereto, is the highest attainment of creature wisdom, and constitutes the sum of practical religion. This attainment is the end contemplated in the THIRD PETITION of the Lord's Prayer, in which we pray that God's will may be done in earth by His creature man, as entirely as it is done by the higher intelligences in heaven.

There is a certain sense in which the accomplishment of God's will is not properly an object of prayer. The most high God is the Creator and sovereign Disposer of all His creatures and all their actions. His kingdom is over all His works, whether in the natural, the moral, the spiritual, or the political world. The revolutions of the heavenly bodies, the vicissitudes of the seasons, the flux and reflux of the deep waters, are not more certainly determined by His laws, than are the rise and fall of empires, or the various emotions that swell and subside within the human breast. It is a simple and inevitable truth, involved in the most elementary conception of a Supreme Deity, that HIS WILL IS DONE. It is both philo-

sophically and theologically absurd to acknowledge a sovereign God, and yet to suppose that His creatures are capable of frustrating His designs, or of doing anything whatever that is not according to His will. Nothing can be more certain than that, in every part of the universe, God's will MUST be done. If the petition, then, has any reference at all to the accomplishment of God's will as a philosophical necessity, it can only be used to express our acquiescence and submission. We may thus profess ourselves well content that the final disposal of all events is beyond the control of our fallible judgments, and that it rests with Him who knows all things, and sees the end as well as the beginning. We profess that to this arrangement we submit, not merely because we cannot change it, but because we would not have it changed; because we believe it in all respects wise and merciful that events should not be within our own power, and that at every step we should be dependent on Him in whom we live and move and have our being, and without whom not a hair of our heads can fall to the ground.

But while no truth is so entirely self-evident as that the will of God is absolute, immutable, and irresistible, it would be a most erroneous and unhappy inference from this truth to say that the future is so fixed by a blind fatality as to render our prayers and efforts alike nugatory. For God's will, though it be absolute, is accomplished by means; and especially in human affairs it is accomplished by human instrumentality. We are God's creatures: we are also God's instruments: these truths are the foundation of all religion; and to know and feel these truths is the beginning of all religious experience. But we are not like the sun and moon, or the trees, or the lower animals, which fulfil God's will mechanically, or at least unconsciously. Man is a moral

agent, and as such God deals with him. God has delegated to man certain powers, the chief of which are *reason*, which enables him to decide between truth and falsehood; and *conscience*, which enables him to decide between right and wrong. And as both these powers are impaired by the corruption of our nature through sin, God has given us His holy law written in His Word, as an infallible standard of truth and right. Not to burden these pages with metaphysical discussions, suffice it to say that, practically, man is left to the freedom of his own will, to obey or disobey; and that, in fact, so soon as he is capable of exercising his will, every man disobeys and refuses to do God's will as it is declared in His law.* While, therefore, it cannot be questioned that, speaking philosophically, whatsoever comes to pass is strictly in accordance with God's predeterminate counsel and foreknowledge; yet, looking to God's will as declared in His commandments, and regarding man as a moral and responsible agent, who has the power of choosing and refusing, the manifest fact is, that even by the best of men God's will is very imperfectly done, and by the large majority of the human race His preceptive will is not

* The distinction between God's secret will, or will of determination, and His revealed will, or will of precept, is nowhere more clearly pointed out than in the subtile and masterly treatise of Jerome Zanchius on the doctrine of Predestination, which was translated by Toplady. Concerning "the will of God" Zanchius lays down the following positions:—"Though the will of God, considered in itself, is simply one and the same, yet, in condescension to the present capacities of men, the Divine will is very properly distinguished into *secret* and *revealed*. . . . . Because God's will of precept may, in some instances, appear to thwart His will of determination, it does not follow, either that He mocks His creatures, or that they are excusable for neglecting to observe His will of command. . . . . God's hidden will is peremptory and absolute, and therefore cannot be hindered from taking effect. . . . . In consequence of God's immutable will and infallible foreknowledge, whatever things come to pass come to pass *necessarily*; though with respect to second causes, and us men, many things are *contingent*."

done at all. God says, "THOU SHALT;" Man says, "I WILL NOT."

In a word, man is in a state of rebellion against God, his lawful Sovereign. Our Lord teaches us in this petition to acknowledge and bewail this rebellion, and to pray that our race collectively, and ourselves individually, may be restored to our allegiance. The very terms of the petition imply an acknowledgment that God's preceptive will is not done in earth, that His name is dishonoured, and that His laws are practically trampled under foot; and they express a prayer that ourselves and others may be disposed and enabled to understand and obey His will in all things. Our minds being darkened by sin, we do not understand what God's will is, or at least we understand it very imperfectly. Our first desire, therefore, must be to learn what the will of God is; and having ascertained it either from His Word or from the leadings of His providence, our next desire will be that we may learn to obey and submit to it in all things; to obey, if there is something to be done; to submit, if there is something to be endured; that we may be enabled to say in sincerity, "Father, not my will, but Thine be done!"

Such is probably the general intention of the prayer, "Thy will be done." But the words which our Lord has subjoined to this prayer suggest much instruction of a practical kind, and necessary to the right apprehension of this essentially practical petition. We are taught to contrast our own disloyalty and rebellion with the willing and loving obedience of the inhabitants of heaven. He bids us say in effect: "Thy will is in all things done in heaven: in earth it is not so; but we pray that the obedience rendered in earth may be as complete as that which is rendered in heaven." It thus appears that the main force and significance of the petition, not in its

speculative, but in its practical application, lies in the words, "as it is in heaven;" and we are thus invited to meditate on the subject of angelic obedience, which is here set before us as a pattern.

"Bless the LORD, ye His angels, that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word. Bless ye the LORD, all ye His hosts; ye ministers of His, that do His pleasure. Bless the LORD, all His works in all places of His dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul" (Ps. ciii. 20-22). This devout language of the sweet Psalmist of Israel is a striking illustration of the identity of the Holy Spirit's teaching in all ages. The aspirations of David convey substantially the same lessons that are taught by the petition now under consideration, and will assist us in answering the question, How is God's will done by the angels in heaven? From this and other parts of holy Scripture we may learn that the angels do God's will intelligently, humbly, diligently, constantly, cheerfully, harmoniously, and promptly.

First, The blessed angels do God's will INTELLIGENTLY.

Not that in every case they know or understand God's ultimate purposes; for we are told that "the angels desire to look into" the things which God hath appointed (1 Pet. i. 12). The angels are not omniscient, and cannot be supposed to know God's reasons for everything He bids them do. Yet it is not a blind obedience that the angels render. They understand that God, being the sovereign Lord of all, must know His mind and His own purposes, as creatures cannot possibly know them; and having an enlightened confidence in His wisdom, they regard obedience as the most reasonable

thing possible. We children of men, in like manner, do not understand God's reasons for everything He bids us do, though in many cases He has condescended to make His counsel plain. But we are called to a "reasonable service;" and where we cannot fully comprehend, we ought to feel that simple obedience is the highest reason, and to apply our understandings, not to curious questionings into the mystery of God's will beyond what He has seen fit to reveal, but to the efficient and ready performance of His specific commands. When Abraham was commanded "to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, he obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Heb. xi. 8). So also, when he was tried, he offered up Isaac. He did not know God's ultimate intention, but not the less he obeyed; and this is an example of intelligent obedience, the intelligence being the fruit of faith rather than of knowledge. This is true wisdom. To obey thus, trusting in God the Only-wise, and believing that all things will ultimately be made plain, is to obey intelligently, as the angels do in heaven.

Secondly, The angels do the will of God HUMBLY.

We might suppose that the very term "obedience" implied humility—that it implied an acknowledgment of God's supremacy and of our own subjection. Such, doubtless, is the reasonable view of the matter. Whomsoever we obey, his servants we are (Rom. vi. 16); and surely the proper attitude of a servant towards the master he serves is one, not of independence, but of humility. The angels stand continually before God, covering their faces with their wings in token of submission, and ready to fly with outspread and untiring pinions to do His high behests. So mote it be in earth! But man, proud man, fallen, guilty, polluted, prides himself on his imperfect obedience, while that of the angels, which is

perfect, makes them humble. Man arrogates merit to himself, because he sometimes does, erroneously and defectively, what the King has commanded and strengthened him to do. He saith in his heart, "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth!" (Deut. viii. 17.) "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" (Dan. iv. 30.) Nothing is so thoroughly distasteful to the natural man as to be told that he has nothing whereof to glory, and that even if he were to do all that God commanded him, he would still be an unprofitable servant. Yet this hard lesson we must learn before this prayer can be realized. We must learn that we are but instruments; and remembering our accountability to God for the talents intrusted to us, we must be willing that all the glory shall be His.

Thirdly, The angels do God's will DILIGENTLY.

This word "diligently" is derived from a Latin word which signifies "to love." To work diligently is simply to work *lovingly*, or with a will, *con amore*, as the Italians literally express it. So the Apostle enjoins: "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men" (Col. iii. 23). When we are doing something that we like to do, and for some one that we entirely love, we put forth our utmost skill, and exert our utmost strength. No man ever yet attained to eminence in any art or profession which he did not like, and that simply because he did not labour in it with all his heart. He may, from a feeling of self-respect, or from a higher feeling of conscientiousness, do everything that the most severe interpretation of professional duty demands, and will honourably earn his salary; but we all know the wide difference between this perfunctory discharge of duty as duty, and that enthusiasm in a man's profession or

occupation which carries him over every obstacle and almost forces him into the front ranks. We all know, too, that even when a man does not find his occupation entirely congenial to his taste, he will nevertheless labour diligently and even enthusiastically, if he be labouring for those he loves. Look at the slow, nerveless stroke of the slave or the prisoner, to whom toil is a punishment! And look at the manly vigour of the free labourer on a free soil, who has a beloved wife and children depending upon his single arm! Blessed domestic ties! How they hallow and enliven the coarsest drudgery! How they sweeten the cup of toil! What pith they put into the sinews! Now, a Christian labourer, no matter what may be his particular field, or whether his labour be of the brain or of the hands, will always labour "diligently," doing with his might whatsoever his hand findeth to do; and that, not only from the natural motives which excite natural men to diligence, but from the higher motive of love to Christ. He will not only take an interest in the work which God has given him to do in this life, however humble, but he will feel that he is labouring for Christ, and will do Him service with good-will. There is a tendency in men to be dissatisfied with their position, and to think that they would be better men, and serve God more faithfully, if they were placed otherwise than they are, or elsewhere. This is not a Christian feeling. Our position in life is God's will concerning us; and it is by striving to labour "diligently" in that position that we shall make the nearest approach to doing God's will in earth as it is done in heaven.

Fourthly, To diligence must be added CONSTANCY, or ASSIDUITY, as another characteristic of angelic obedience.

The holy inhabitants of heaven "rest not day and night." Constancy in this degree is not possible to our

mortal frames and feebler powers; but according to our capabilities we must be patient and persevering in the path of duty, as well as faithful in the employment of our best energies. A Christian desirous of showing "good fidelity" will not labour by fits and spurts, but *constantly.* Like every man who *means work,* he will have his time regularly and providently apportioned to his duties, and will be careful that nothing is neglected, and nothing forgotten. One can hardly imagine an angel excusing his laches by saying, "I forgot," or, "I had no time." Men certainly are not angels; but it is not unreasonable to ask whether much of what is put to the score of forgetfulness and want of time is not rather the fault of want of system. It is by steadfastness and order, rather than by genius or strength, that the greatest results have been accomplished. "Nulla dies sine linea,"* is the simple solution of many marvels. Angels do not ordinarily work miracles, any more than men; but the angels are always busy. It is thus that God's will is done in heaven.

Fifthly, The blessed angels do God's will CHEERFULLY, without murmuring. God in His good providence calls us to do and suffer many things grievous to flesh and blood. Sometimes, for example, He keeps men in humble and obscure positions, and assigns them a plodding unexciting round of duty, while they are longing for a more distinguished sphere, and have a soul above the prosaic details of daily life. God sent Moses to keep sheep in the bush for forty years when he would fain have struck a blow for the deliverance of Israel. David, though designated to the throne of the kingdom,

* *No day without a line.* Such is said to have been the reply of Luther when he was asked how he had found time to write so many volumes. Many great writers, more voluminous than Luther, might with perfect truth have given the same answer.

must needs pass through a preparatory discipline in the wilderness. Sorely he felt the restraint, and in no respect more sorely than in being hindered from the worship of God in the tabernacle. Yet afterwards, when he saw the way of God more perfectly, he said, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes" (Ps. cxix. 71). Christians are too apt to forget that they are left in this world, not to do their own will, but the will of their heavenly Father. It may be quite legitimate to desire a sphere of more extensive usefulness; but is not this sometimes a cloak for worldly ambition? Do we not sometimes desire advancement, not simply that we may do God better service, but that we may have more ease and more distinction for ourselves? It is thus that Christians so frequently and lamentably deceive themselves, forgetting that our Father has the right to dispose of us as to Him seemeth best; forgetting that if He has higher work for us to do, it is necessary that we should be trained for it; and forgetting also that "the recompense of the reward" to which we look in the world to come will be proportioned, not to the distinguished character of our work here, but to the fidelity with which we labour. The poor, humble, unknown teacher in a ragged school, who has but "two talents," and employs them faithfully, shall enter into the eternal joy equally with his more conspicuous and brilliant fellow-servant who had "five talents," but who could do no more than employ them faithfully in the service of their common Lord. Such considerations, if we allowed them to have due weight with us, would help us to walk cheerfully in whatever path the Lord may open before us, and to toil cheerfully in whatever corner of His field He may appoint for us, not simply because we *must*, and cannot help ourselves, but because it is His will, and we are therefore sure that it is designed

in faithfulness and love. So also with respect to our trials and afflictions. Let us not think it grievous that our idols are broken, or the objects of our earthly affections removed. To weep in time of tribulation is not, indeed, forbidden; but the true believer has learned to rejoice even while he weeps.*

Sixthly, The blessed angels do the will of God HARMONIOUSLY, without strife or envying.

They work together, or severally, as appointed; but always remembering that they serve the same Master, and that they must not please themselves, but Him whose servants they are. They do not quarrel with each other about their respective duties, and are not envious if one is sent on a distinguished mission, while others are employed in humbler offices. One is sent, it may be, to minister to the Son of God (Luke xxii. 43); another to minister to a prophet (1 Kings xix. 5); another to smite a kingdom (2 Sam. xxiv. 16); another to destroy an army (2 Kings xix. 35); while another may be sent to comfort a female slave (Gen. xvi. 7; xxi. 17); or to carry a beggar into Abraham's bosom (Luke xvi. 22); each accepts his appointed office without a thought other than how he may most efficiently discharge it: there is neither pride on the one side, nor jealousy on the other.† God's will is not so done in earth, even by those who call themselves servants of Christ. Even among those who are more expressly and prominently

* "If an angel were sent to find the most perfect man, he would probably not find him composing a body of divinity, but perhaps a cripple in a poor-house, whom the parish wish dead: a man humbled before God, with far lower thoughts of himself than others have of him."—JOHN NEWTON's Works, edition 1824, vol. i. p. 99.

† "If two angels came down from heaven to execute a Divine command, and one was appointed to conduct an empire, and the other to sweep a street in it, they would feel no inclination to choose employments."—JOHN NEWTON, *ubi supra.*

engaged in His service there is far too much striving who shall be the greatest. Too frequently we do not find it a sufficient distinction to be fellow-workers with God. We must needs choose our own posts, and each would have precedence over his brethren. This unholy ambition exhibits itself in a thousand forms. It intrudes into our ecclesiastical organizations, into congregational or denominational efforts for the cause of Christ, and into associations of Christians of several denominations. How hard is it to maintain a single eye! How hard to avoid all self-seeking! How prone are even the most devout men to magnify things acknowledged to be of secondary importance into undue proportions, because they tend to glorify their own sect or party! How frequently do these petty matters cause heart-burnings, strifes, and schisms! How fatally do they cripple and paralyze us, and neutralize our efforts, so that Christ's work is neglected, and the enemy gains ground! Not until Christians have learned to think less of their self-importance, and more of the Lord's work,—not until they learn to walk together in love as fellow-disciples of the same prophet,—not until they feel themselves as soldiers enlisted in a common cause, under the same banner, and under the same commander, will it be possible that God's will shall be done in earth as it is done in heaven.

Seventhly, One other characteristic of angelic obedience remains to be noticed, and that has been reserved to the last, because without it all the others will be in a great measure inoperative. The blessed angels do God's will PROMPTLY, at the word of command.

Christians are, on the contrary, very dilatory and procrastinating. Does the Father say to His sons, "Go work to-day in my vineyard?"—there are some who will say, readily enough, "I go;" but either they have no

real intention of going, or else they say in their hearts, "I will go to-morrow, or next week, or next year: there is time enough!" Others profess willingness to go, but have a number of questions to ask, and until these are resolved they cannot make up their minds to do as they are bidden. It is thus that many Christian parents allow their children to treat them, instead of insisting on immediate and unquestioning obedience. It may be perfectly right for parents to explain their reasons to their children, so far as they admit of explanation, or the children are capable of understanding them; but children ought never to be suffered to require explanation as a condition of obedience. A parent who feels his own authority and responsibility will say to his child, "Obey at once, and without questioning. I will give all proper explanations at a proper time." Or if it be not proper to give any explanation, he will say so plainly. No parent who has any respect for his children will attempt to impose upon them by a fictitious reason or a pretended explanation; for he knows that his children will soon detect the cheat, and that both his authority and their confidence in him will be at an end. A parent will never deceive his child, if he desires to see him grow up an honest man, with courage to speak the truth, even at the risk of loss or danger. Let parents accustom their children to place reliance upon them, and never to feel that they have trusted them in vain. Thus they will most effectually train their children to do God's will when they come to act on their own responsibility. God requires us to do many things, as well as to believe many things, which we cannot comprehend; but it should be enough for us that the Lord hath spoken. To question His word, or to delay the performance of His command, because we do not see the reason of it, is the conduct of froward, rebellious

children, and not of those whose citizenship is of heaven (Phil. iii. 20). Let Christians, then, strive to manifest more of that promptitude which distinguishes all true obedience. Let our feet be shod with the preparation (preparedness) of the Gospel of peace—that is, with the readiness of will, and promptitude of action which flow from a believing reception of the "glad tidings of great joy." A willing mind and a ready hand are the chief elements of success in all human affairs. Without these the most commanding genius can never accomplish anything really good or great; but with these, directed by the constraining love of Christ, we may approximate, so far as fallible mortals can attain, to the obedience of the angels in heaven.

It behoves all professing Christians to examine themselves by these tests. Are there not many who have assumed the Christian name, and yet have made no conscientious effort to act in the spirit of their prayers? who have never really subordinated one thought or one affection to the will of God, but have lived all their lives doing what was right in their own eyes? Are there not many who render only a partial obedience, vainly striving to accomplish the impossible task of serving two masters?—many who are very imperfectly acquainted with God's will, and yet are not availing themselves of the opportunities afforded them for their instruction? And oh, are there not many who know their Lord's will, and yet do it not? What saith the counsel of God unto them? "That servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to His will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes" (Luke xii. 47, 48). Even ignorance, which we are so apt to think an excuse for dis-

obedience, is only a palliation of guilt, not a complete justification. It may be admitted in mitigation of punishment, but not as a claim to pardon; while for those who cannot allege even this poor plea, there remaineth nothing but judgment and fiery indignation, without mitigation, without respite, and without redemption for ever.

While we are in this mortal body we cannot do more than approximate to the obedience of heaven. But we pray for more than an approximation: we pray for actual attainment. And the prayer shall certainly be answered in the full extent of its meaning when the kingdom of glory shall be established in the earth, and the King of Zion shall have put all things under His feet. The opposition and the rebellion which are now tolerated for wise and holy purposes shall then be quelled for ever, and in earth, as in heaven, there shall be only ONE WILL. Thus the third petition of the Lord's Prayer helps us to a full understanding of the second; for to pray that God's will may be done in earth as it is in heaven, is in effect to pray that God's kingdom may come. It is for this glorious consummation that the believer labours and waits. It is by striving to do God's will faithfully amidst the many lets and hindrances of this fallen world that we prepare ourselves, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, for the perfect doing of it when all our present weights and clogs shall have been removed, and when those blessed angels, who are now sent forth as "flying poursuivants" to minister to the Zionward pilgrims, and "succour us that succour want"* in our trials and difficulties, shall welcome us to the realms of light and peace, and join us in serving God "without fault" in the regions of eternal day; for "THERE SHALL BE NO NIGHT THERE" (Rev. xxii. 5).

* Spenser's "Faërie Queene."

## XXV.

## THE LORD'S PRAYER—(*continued*).

"Give us this day our daily bread."—MATT vi. 11.

THE first Three Petitions of the Lord's Prayer, which have been considered, have respect to the manifestation, here and hereafter, of the glory of God. The remaining three petitions have respect to human wants, temporal and spiritual. One only of these three is concerned about temporal things; and this seems designed indirectly to teach us that we ought to be less concerned for the bread that perisheth than for that which endureth unto everlasting life. At the same time, we have reason to adore the grace and condescension of our blessed Lord, who, though He is heir of all things, is touched with a feeling of all human infirmities, and has taught us to place *first in order* those wants of our nature which are the most clamant, and the supply of which is indispensable to our earthly existence. We are not at liberty to suppose that the arrangement of the petitions is a matter of indifference. It may be reasonably inferred that, as the *proportion* which the fourth petition bears to the whole prayer indicates the inferior importance of temporal things, so, on the other hand, the *relative position* which it occupies is intended to teach, not only that

it is lawful, but that it is our duty, to pray for the things necessary for the body, before we pray for things necessary for the soul.

And the reason of this order is very evident. We are more dependent upon our bodies than many, who earnestly desire high spirituality of character, are willing to admit, even to themselves. It is impossible to have a thoroughly sound mind in an unsound body; and as the soundness of the body mainly depends on a regular and sufficient supply of wholesome food and other necessaries, it is the dictate of universal experience, that attention to the bodily wants must precede, in point of time, attention to the wants of the soul. We are no sooner born than we require food; and the most suitable food is provided for the infant by God Himself, in a natural fountain, the moment it is required; but many months, or rather years, elapse before the child can even comprehend its spiritual necessities. And even after we are grown, and have by grace been enabled to feel spiritual hunger and thirst, we are unable, constituted as we are, to engage profitably in any spiritual exercise demanding the whole attention, while we are in a state of bodily discomfort, and still less while any imperious bodily necessity is unsatisfied. It is true that men are not usually prone to err in this direction: the more common error is to indulge the bodily appetites beyond what is necessary for the healthful action of the whole man, or even consistent with it. But if there be a danger of one kind in pampering the body, there is a danger of an opposite kind, of which the Word of God bids us beware, in supposing that true religion consists in neglecting the body, or that, in order to keep under the body and bring it into subjection, we must needs treat with disdain the ordinary comforts and conveniences of civilized life. The apostolic rule is, "Whether

ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. x. 31). The glory of God is the first consideration: one-half of the Lord's Prayer, and that the first half, relates wholly to that object. Our own wants, physical or spiritual, are second to that: second in importance, and second in order. But when we come to speak of these wants, while we are undoubtedly taught to regard the interests of the soul as of the highest concernment, there is a manifest condescension to human infirmity in our being taught to ask for necessary bread before we ask for pardon and direction.

With these preliminary remarks, we may proceed to consider the substance of the petition itself. The FOURTH PETITION of the Lord's Prayer is, "GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD."

It has been justly observed concerning this petition, that every separate word conveys a separate practical lesson.

First, A lesson of MODERATION and CONTENTMENT: we are taught to ask for BREAD.

Secondly, A lesson of HONESTY and INDUSTRY: we are taught to ask for OUR bread.

Thirdly, A lesson of continual DEPENDENCE upon God: we are taught to ask for DAILY BREAD.

Fourthly, A lesson of HUMILITY: we are taught to ask for our bread as a GIFT from God.

Fifthly, A lesson of SYMPATHY and CHARITY: we are taught to ask for bread not for ourselves alone, but for OTHERS also.

Sixthly, We are taught a lesson against CAREFULNESS and AVARICE: our bread is a gift, which we must ask and expect to receive DAY BY DAY.

First, then, We are taught a lesson of MODERATION and CONTENTMENT.

Under the general term "bread" are included all things needful for the body—water, fire, raiment, a habitation—the *necessaries* of civilized life, not its luxuries or superfluities. The necessaries of CIVILIZED LIFE: for the Word of God does not contemplate man in a savage condition, living upon raw roots and berries, or the flesh of wild beasts, birds, fish, or reptiles, and covered only with raw hides, or mats of vegetable fibre. Man's primitive condition was one of civilization, of social order, good government, plenty, and comfort. The savage state is simply an exhibition of the natural consequences of that moral and physical degradation and misery which sin brought into the world, and which might have been the condition of all mankind but for the distinguishing grace of God, irrespectively of any human merits. It has been found extremely difficult, if not altogether impossible, to convey any accurate knowledge of religious truth to men in an absolutely savage condition; and this fact is an additional proof that the precedence in point of position assigned in this prayer to the necessities of the body is not arbitrary, but is in harmony with physiological laws. It is the concurrent testimony of all missionary experience, that before the Gospel can be expected to take effectual hold of any people, they must be raised above physical want, so far, at least, as that the mere cravings of hunger and thirst shall not exhaust their whole thoughts, but that some room shall be left for the development of higher aspirations. The measure of success which, under God, has attended recent evangelistic and educational enterprises among the savage tribes which people the dens of London and other large cities, is mainly to be attributed to the combination of sound social science with Christian philanthropy. We have, tardily and reluctantly, been compelled to acknowledge the truth, and now that it

has been demonstrated, we think it strange that it should have been so long undiscovered—namely, that human beings will not give heed to religious or moral instruction so long as they are hungry and naked, and that all efforts for their amelioration or elevation must begin, as our great COUNSELLOR hath taught us, with the physical element.

The use of the term "bread" in the petition implies a knowledge on the part of the worshipper of the elementary arts of civilization, and sufficiently justifies the interpretation which has been put upon it, namely, that it is a prayer for the necessaries of *civilized life*, in that station to which each man is respectively called. It is not, however, a prayer for anything beyond this: we have no encouragement to pray that we may be clothed in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day. The prayer of Agur is substantially the same as that of this petition: "Give me neither poverty nor riches: feed me with food convenient for me; lest I be full, and deny Thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Prov. xxx. 8, 9). It is obviously inconsistent with the spirit of this petition to have our hearts set on luxuries or possessions, real or personal, beyond what is adequate to our creditable maintenance in our position in life. It is mere mockery to pray for "bread" with our lips, while it is not the sincere desire of our hearts that God would give us *bread*, and make us content therewith, but we are secretly longing for fine houses, fine equipages, gay clothing, delicate dishes, and choice wines—for whatever the heart lusteth after and wealth can procure. Let it be our earnest prayer that all inordinate and selfish desires may be mortified in our breasts, and that we may be directed to ask such things as our heavenly Father knoweth we have need of. Let

us seriously lay to heart the apostolic precept, "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (1 Tim. vi. 6–8).

Secondly, We are taught a lesson of HONESTY and INDUSTRY.

The bread we pray for must be our own, the sweat of our own face, the produce of our own labour. The petition warns us against mocking God by asking that we may eat the bread of *idleness*, or the bread of *deceit*. Yet it is to be feared that both these kinds of bread are eaten by many who have this prayer daily upon their lips. It is unnecessary to speak of the ordinary idlers and swindlers, who are too rife in every civilized community, and concerning the unlawfulness of whose lives there is no dispute. But are there not many, living in circumstances of comparative ease, and above the necessity for manual labour, who do not feel it to be a duty to employ themselves actively for "six days," according to God's commandment, but indulge themselves in idle, lounging, desultory habits, and seem never to think that they have to render an account of their time or their talents? If a man have bread in his house and to spare, he is not on that account to consider himself exempt from the common law of labour. There is no station in life, from the Queen to the peasant, that has not its allotted duties; and the diligent conscientious discharge of those duties is "the sweat of the face" which is necessary before we can righteously and consistently say that we are eating our own bread. Again, there are others who, if they do not seek to eat the bread of idleness, are eating, sometimes perhaps without reflecting upon it, "the bread of deceit," of which the wise man saith, that it "is sweet to a man, but afterwards his

mouth shall be filled with gravel" (Prov. xx. 17). Bread won by fraud or circumvention, by the circulation of what is false, or the suppression of what is true, or by the thousand and one conventional or commercial lies which have been so long current that it is almost impossible to detect them,—such bread cannot be fairly called our own bread. Neither can that be our own bread which is gained by pandering to the vices or follies of others: it is the wages of iniquity! it is the price of blood! Let not "the accursed thing" be found in our tents! In quietness let us work, and eat our own bread (2 Thess. iii. 12). May no heart-broken wife, or neglected child, or sorrowing mother, rise up against us in the day of judgment, and say, "It was in your house that my husband, or parent, or child, was first tempted to begin that downward course which ended in the drunkard's or profligate's dishonoured grave!" Alas! how much of this bread of violence and robbery (for it is no better) is eaten, and by professors of religion too, in many (so-called) Christian lands!

Thirdly, The petition teaches a lesson of CONTINUAL DEPENDENCE UPON GOD: we are taught to pray for DAILY bread.

The word translated "daily"* has a somewhat more extensive signification. It properly means "for our subsistence," or sustenance—a competent or sufficient supply of what is necessary for our temporal well-being. The idea suggested by "daily" more properly belongs to the words "this day," of which hereafter. We are taught to look to God with a feeling of habitual dependence, and confidence that He will provide for us what is meet and right. Unhappily this feeling of habitual dependence is not cherished by mankind generally; and even professing Christians are very unmindful

* *ἐπιούσιον.* See ALFORD'S valuable notes here, and under Luke xi.

of the source of all their comforts. It was the complaint of the prophet of old, that while the dumb irrational brutes knew the hand that fed them, those whom God had endowed with speech and reason, to whom He had given dominion over the works of His hands, and, above all, whom He had chosen to be His peculiar people and had called His children, were insensible of His loving-kindness, and ungrateful for His bounty (Isa. i. 2, 3; Hosea ii. 8; xi. 4, 7). Are we, who under the Gospel dispensation have received much higher blessings, less insensible and less ungrateful? Has not the very regularity with which our wants have been supplied sometimes caused us to forget the Giver? When the manna first began to fall in the wilderness, the children of Israel could not fail to receive it as "bread from heaven;" but ere many days had elapsed the miracle ceased to surprise them; they looked for it as a thing of course, and it did not restrain them from idolatry and rebellion. Now, a true Christian eats his bread with the same feeling of dependence that a devout Israelite must have experienced when he went out to gather his daily supply of manna. And such evidently is the feeling we ought to cherish, watching carefully against the growth of the contrary sentiment, which prompts men to say, "To-morrow shall be as this day, and more abundant" (Isa. lvi. 12). It is when such ungodly sentiments prevail, and men forget their dependence upon Him, that God sometimes, after much long-suffering, visits them in His wrath, and takes away from them "the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water" (Isa. iii. 1). Such chastisements have of late years been frequently experienced in various parts of the British empire, as well as in other lands. The ungodly ascribe these calamities to second causes, as if rust, and blight, and floods, and droughts, and devouring

insects, came without the hand of God. Let not these promptings of the "evil heart of unbelief" tempt us to forget that the most high God ruleth according to His sovereign will in heaven and in earth; that nature's laws are God's laws; and that, if evil come either upon the city or upon the field, it is the LORD that sends it, thus proclaiming with a loud voice to the sons of men, "Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it!" (Micah vi. 9.)

Fourthly, We are taught a lesson of HUMILITY: we ask for our bread as a GIFT from God.

The bread we eat must be our own, the fruit of honest industry: nevertheless, we must ask and receive it as a gift—a free unmerited gift, which even our own labour does not entitle us to regard as absolutely our own. When we have toiled from morning until eventide, the crust of bread that we have honestly earned is not our own by right: it is God's gift. It may be our right as against our fellow-men, especially those of them who have profited by our labour; and it is no doubt a grievous injustice when the hire of the labourer is withheld: the cry of those oppressed and defrauded ones entereth into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth (Jam. v. 4). But though a man has a *better* right to the price of his own labour than any other man, he has not an *absolute* right to anything before God. Nothing that any man can do can supersede the sovereign rights of God: when we have done all that He has commanded us, we are not His creditors, and have no claim upon Him even for a morsel of bread. How much less can we have such claim, when our best performances fall so miserably short of God's requirements; when our most fervent devotions, our most willing sacrifices, our most steadfast faith, and our most ardent love, are so tinged with self and tainted with sin that they need to be

sprinkled with blood from the mercy-seat before they can be recognized even as fruits of the Spirit! We have need to lie low in the dust when presenting this petition, remembering that "we are not our own" (1 Cor. vi. 19). If we call our bread our own, let us reflect who it is that gives us strength to labour, and by His providence directs us to suitable employment. Or if we are so placed in the world that we have no need to labour with our hands, let us remember who it is that hath made us to differ! Rich men are often slow to confess that their riches are God's, and only lent to them to be employed for the service and glory of Him who hath said, "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine" (Hag. ii. 8). "Charge them that are rich in this world," saith the Apostle, "that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim. vi. 17–19).

Fifthly, This petition harmonizes with the other parts of the prayer, in teaching us a lesson of CHARITY and HUMAN SYMPATHY—to remember the wants of others as well as our own. We are taught to say, not "Give *me my* bread," but "Give US OUR bread." We are naturally so prone to selfishness that we have need every moment to be reminded that we are not isolated individuals, and that no man, and especially no Christian man, has a right to look upon his own wants alone, without consideration of the wants of others. God created man for society—civilized society. And no doubt, as has already been observed,* the perfect ideal of human society includes "a community of goods,"

* Pp. 267, *sqq.*

which consists, not in each individual having an equal share, but in the whole being the property of each. This will be realized when the second and third petitions of this prayer have been answered in the full extent of their meaning; when the meek shall inherit the earth; when there shall be no longer distinctions of rank and property, which are but evidences of our fall; and when no laws shall be necessary but the one holy law of love. The dream of the modern Socialist and Communist is not all a dream; though it will not be realized by the revolutionary demolition of existing institutions, and the general partition of spoil, in which such economists would have everything to gain, and nothing to lose. A revolution and an overthrow there certainly will be; but not one which will take the power from kings or constitutional governments, and hand it over to a rapacious and sacrilegious mob. It is God Himself that will overturn the existing state of things, and deliver the kingdoms of this world into the possession of His Son (Ezek. xxi. 27). In His reign the righteous shall flourish; and there will no longer be any need to pray for sufficient bread, for we "shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more." Till that happy consummation of all our hopes and desires, we must remember that we are members of Christ, and every one members one of another; and therefore, when we pray for our own bread, we must bear upon our hearts our brethren and neighbours who have need. "None of us liveth to himself" (Rom. xiv. 7); and as Christians, we are especially bound to care for all that are, from whatever cause, in poverty or distress. Nor must our charitable solicitude end with *praying* for the poor and needy: we are commanded to labour, working with our hands the thing which is good, not merely that we may have

enough for our own house, but also that we may have to give to him that needeth (Eph. iv. 28).

Sixthly, Yet another lesson is taught us in this large petition—a lesson of warning against WORLDLY CARE and AVARICE—that over-carefulness for the future, which is so easily developed into covetousness. We are taught to pray, "Give us THIS DAY;" or as it is more strongly expressed by S. Luke, "DAY BY DAY."* The meaning is, that we should pray for one day's supply at a time, taking no thought—having no anxiety—for the morrow (ver. 34); the language, not improbably, having allusion to the daily supply of manna in the wilderness, concerning which it was specially commanded that none should be kept till the morning. We are not warranted in asking for more than the supply of our wants *day by day*. We are not warranted in seeking riches to hoard up, that we may feed our vanity by appearing before men as the possessors of great wealth, or that we may have large fortunes to leave behind us. There is something almost awful in the idea of a man, especially a Christian man, heaping up riches during a long life, and dying with an immense sum in his coffers, which might and ought to have been employed in the service of Christ. How little does such a man know or feel his responsibility! Of what an amount of the purest pleasure does he deprive himself! What an amount of human suffering might he not have relieved! How many fatherless children might he not have fed, clothed, and educated! How many a widow's heart might he not have caused to sing for joy! Into what dark places of

S. Matthew has σήμερον = "to-day;" S. Luke, καθ' ἡμέραν = "every day," or "day by day." The Manks version of the petition is, CUR DOOIN NYN ARRAN JIU AS GAGH LAA = *Give us our bread this day and every day.*

the earth might he not have sent the lamp of Divine truth! Of how many souls that were ready to perish might he not have won a blessing! How many friends might he not have made by the mammon of unrighteousness, who, when his fleshly tabernacle failed, should have welcomed him to everlasting habitations! (Luke xvi. 9.) Alas! his only thought was to die a rich man; and he had the reward he sought in the ignorant envy and sycophancy of the multitude. He has at length gone to his own place: his body has been carried to a costly sepulchre; the sombre garments have been donned; the sombre plumes have waved; the last solemn rite has been duly performed. His soul—ah! he knows, now, the vanity of earthly things: he finds that all his wealth cannot purchase one drop of cold water: he has learned the meaning of that word of warning, "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Matt. xvi. 26.)

But while this petition warns us against worldly solicitude, and the growth of a hoarding spirit, it must not be abused to justify a wasteful improvident disposition. God's Word everywhere inculcates frugal habits. "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise" (Prov. vi. 6). To make provision for sickness or old age, so that we shall not be a burden to our friends or the public; to provide for the education of our children, or for establishing them in life; to provide things honest* in the sight of all men (Rom. xii. 17); these are duties plainly sanctioned by Scripture, by the dictates of conscience, and by common sense. But to do these things is widely different from amassing wealth that we may bury it in the earth; very different from laying

* Καλὰ here signifies things decent, respectable, and becoming our station. Such was included in the meaning of the English word "honest," according to its usage at the time of our authorized version.

house to house and field to field, that our children after us may live in idleness and luxury, and despise the toil or the trade to which they will have owed their position, and in which their parents drudged for their thankless sakes. In a word, we must distinguish between "care" and "carefulness." A true proverb saith, "Careless folk are graceless folk." The Apostle says, "I would have you without carefulness" (1 Cor. vii. 32); and again, "Be careful for nothing" (Phil. iv. 6). And our blessed Lord teaches us to pray, "Give us our daily bread day by day."

To conclude. While this petition undoubtedly refers primarily to temporal things, and teaches chiefly temporal lessons, it ought not to be forgotten that "man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live" (Deut. viii. 3). While we pray for bread, we must not forget that we, who pray, are not mere animals, "like cattle, prone, and obedient to the belly."* We have immortal souls, as well as mortal bodies; and the soul needs its daily bread as well as its fleshly tenement. Nothing is more certain than that, as want of regular diet causes failure of bodily strength, so neglect in seeking regular supplies of spiritual food will produce declension of spiritual vigour. We cannot have strong bodies, or keep them strong, without suitable and sufficient food; nor can our souls be fat and flourishing, if they are not daily fed with the bread of life. There is, however, one point in which our prayers for spiritual food must differ from our prayers for that which is needful for the body. We are taught to ask for daily bread "day by day;" but with respect to Christ, the Bread of Life, our prayer must be, "Lord, evermore give us this bread" (John vi. 34). There is a limitation

* "Veluti pecora, prona, et obedientia ventri."—SALLUST.

to our desires and to our petitions for temporal things; but when we ask for spiritual blessings, we need not fear to exceed due limits. The common error is to ask too little. Christians are very slow to grasp the truth, that it is impossible for them to ask from God more than He is willing to grant. If we had but faith to prove Him according to His own Word, we should find that we have not room enough for the showers of blessings He is ready to send down. Let it be our constant prayer, then, that He may feed us with the finest of the wheat, and satisfy our souls with honey out of the rock (Ps. lxxxi. 16); that we may be filled with the fatness of His house, and be made to drink daily of the river of His pleasures (Ps. xxxvi. 8).

## XXVI.

## THE LORD'S PRAYER—(*continued*).

"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. . . . .
"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:
"But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."—MATT. vi. 12, 14, 15.

IN the remarks that have been offered on the Fourth Petition it has been shown that, while there is a manifest and gracious condescension to human infirmity in the precedence given to temporal wants, the proportion which that petition bears to the whole prayer teaches, at the same time, the inferior importance of temporal things, and that the kingdom of God and His righteousness are ever to be regarded as the objects of our highest concernment. The tendencies of our fallen nature are, unhappily, in the opposite direction. The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and in the natural man it asserts not only precedence, but also predominance. They that are spiritual have learned, more or less fully, the true relative value of these conflicting appetencies; but, nevertheless, such is our frailty still, and so potent still is the law in our members that warreth against the law of our better judgment, that our spiritual necessities would frequently be neglected or forgotten were we not continually

reminded of them by the ordinances of God. The natural cravings of hunger compel us to seek for bread; but there is no such natural craving after spiritual food, without which, nevertheless, the soul must faint and fail. The ordinances of the Sabbath, and of the morning and evening sacrifice, reminded the Israelites of their need of forgiveness, as well as of spiritual rest and refreshment. The same ordinances, divested of their ceremonial character, remain to us: we have our Christian Sabbath, or the Lord's-day, and our sacrifices of praise and prayer. And the form or pattern of prayer prescribed for our direction and use is so constructed, that while we pray for temporal things we shall not be suffered to forget the wants of our souls. It is not without a meaning that the copulative "And" is placed at the beginning of this Fifth Petition. It means, that though we may ask for bread first, we must not stop there, but simultaneously ask for the supply of our higher necessities. The previous petitions are not connected by this conjunction: each is complete in itself. But the petition for a sufficiency of bread is not complete: in order to the full supply of the whole man, the forgiveness and protecting care of God are further necessary. Consequently, when we have prayed, saying, "Give us this day our daily bread," we are taught to add, "AND forgive us our debts; AND lead us not into temptation."

The FIRST lesson that appears to be taught in this petition is, that BY OUR SINS WE ARE ALL DEBTORS TO GOD.

That the word "debts" is intended to denote *sins*, is plain from the parallel passage in Luke (xi. 4). "And forgive us our *sins;* for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us;" and also from the verses before us (14, 15), which are obviously added by our Lord ex-

pressly to elucidate this particular petition, and in which we find the word "trespasses" used as equivalent to the "debts" of the petition itself. The use of these three distinct terms, sins, trespasses, and debts,* to denote moral offences, is highly instructive, and demands our attention.

The Greek word translated "sin" properly signifies a *miss*, as when a man aims at a mark and fails to hit it; or, trying to reach a certain place, *misses* his path and goes astray. The Anglo-Saxon "sin" is an exact rendering of the Greek word here used; for the radical sense of "sin" is a *wandering* from the right path, or *missing* our mark. It is implied that a mark has been set before us, and a way pointed out; and whether we miss it from unskilfulness, or ignorance, or carelessness, or are drawn aside by the force of temptation, we are guilty of sin.

The word translated "trespass," and elsewhere "transgression," signifies both *a fall*, and *a passing beyond a boundary*. The English word "trespass" includes only the latter of these significations; but no doubt every trespass beyond the right path is morally a fall. In the Epistle to the Romans (v. 15) the same word is translated "offence;" but though "offence" may be implied in a trespass, it is not actually expressed by the Greek word here used. The idea suggested by the word "trespasses" is, that God has marked and fenced off a boundary line by His holy law; that every transgression of this boundary line, or want of observance of it, is sin; and that every such transgression or failure of observance is a lapse, a fall, a false and downward step in the broad way, implying both defilement and degradation.

Lastly, the word "debts," which exactly expresses the meaning of the original word, teaches us that by our sins, original and actual, we are all *debtors to God*. We come into this world with a heritage of debt;

* Ἁμαρτία = sin; παράπτωμα = trespass; ὀφείλημα = debt.

and so far from doing anything to liquidate it, every one of us begins at once to add to his obligations by his own personal transgressions and shortcomings. To come short of that perfect obedience which God's law demands is a debt, a sin of omission, which, not less than transgressions or sins of commission, renders us obnoxious to the curse of the law (Gal. iii. 10). To revert to the language of the previous chapter (ver. 25), God speaking in His law is an "adversary" against us —our pursuer at law, who has a just claim against us; and it is alike our duty and our interest to seek that His claim may be satisfied, lest we be haled before the inexorable judgment-seat, and cast into that eternal prison, from which none can come out until he pays the uttermost farthing of his debt.

In considering the "debts" spoken of in this petition, therefore, we must keep in view all these elements, which are necessary to complete the scriptural definition of sin. Sin is a failure, or doing amiss, which, even when it is the result of ignorance or weakness, is culpable, for both knowledge and strength are within our reach; but more commonly it is the result of lack of vigilance, or the power of temptation. Sin is also a transgression; not merely a coming short of what God requires, but a positive and overt passing beyond the boundary-fence of His commandment. It is also a fall—a fall into the miry clay—the effect of which is injury, pollution, and dishonour. It is also a debt, for which we are justly liable to prosecution, a debt to which we add new items every hour of our lives. Even when we have been regenerated and united to Christ, though we are, through faith in His blood and righteousness, redeemed from the curse of the law, we nevertheless remain to such an extent under the influence of sinful affections, that we contract additional debt and defilement every day, so

that every day we are bound to confess ourselves debtors to God.

The SECOND lesson taught in this petition is, that, whether these debts of ours be debts of inheritance or of our own personal contracting, whether of five hundred pence or of fifty (Luke vii. 41), whether more or less heinous, *we are utterly unable to pay them.*

Had it been possible for us by any means to satisfy the claims of our Divine creditor, either by performances, efforts, or sacrifices of our own, we should not have been taught to ask for a remission of the debt. In the affairs of this world, a debtor is not permitted to ask for protection from his creditors unless he can show himself to be hopelessly insolvent, and that in consequence of misfortunes, and not of his own indolence, neglect, or extravagance. Even then, all that he has, down to the clothes he wears, and the mattress on which he sleeps, must be placed at the disposal of his creditors. If it appear, after an investigation of his affairs, that he has acted honourably and righteously, the law will give him an acquittance from legal responsibility, so that he cannot be prosecuted for his past debts; but it is perfectly understood that an insolvent's certificate does not really absolve him from debt, but only from its legal consequences. There are only two ways in which a debt can really be extinguished, namely, full payment on the part of the debtor, or free forgiveness on the part of the creditor.

Now, in the case as between God and the sinner, a debt has been contracted, which, from the very nature of it, can never be paid by the debtor. No future obedience can obliterate past sin. No amount of punishment can expiate the guilt of even the smallest sin. It is true that all men are not equally guilty: it is true that some

owe five hundred pence, and others fifty; but then we are as unable to pay the fifty pence as the five hundred. Those who have transgressed the laws of their country, and have suffered the stripes, or the bonds, or the penal servitude assigned to their specific crimes, are apt to imagine that by such endurance their debt has been extinguished; but this is a sad mistake. Punishment does not cancel sin: it only satisfies the law, and absolves from further legal consequences: the debt and the guilt remain untouched; and nothing that either the criminal himself or his fellow-men can do, can either efface the crime or change its character. Nay, more: the eternal punishment of the sinner cannot cancel his debt: the uttermost farthing can never be paid by him who is unable to pay even the smallest instalment; and thus the worm of eternal corruption can never die, and the fire of eternal vengeance can never be quenched. The debts which any man has contracted to the infinitely holy God, however small they may seem in comparison with those of other men, are of infinite demerit, and of inextinguishable obligation; and therefore we, being finite and fallible creatures, can do absolutely nothing towards the extinction or reduction of our debts.

THIRDLY, then, it is because we are utterly unable to pay, that we are taught, not only in this petition, but throughout the whole Word of God, to ask for the *free forgiveness of our debts.*

And it would seem, on the first view, that the granting of such an act of sovereign condonation on God's part involved no greater effort of condescension than the remission by a wealthy and generous creditor of a debt due by a wretched insolvent pauper. Such is, indeed, the partial and fallacious view in which many indulge. "God is merciful," say they; "it costs Him

nothing to forgive: what could it profit Him to damn our souls, or to cast us poor sinners into prison for our debts?" It is by such fatal sophistry as this that men flatter themselves in their sins, and secretly cherish the belief, if they do not openly avow it, that *somehow or other* they will be forgiven, and will not be delivered to the tormentors. These foolish builders, who care not whether they are building on a good foundation or not, have need that one should teach them the first principles of the oracles of God, and convince them that *such* an act of forgiveness on God's part is impossible, for it would involve a contradiction of truth and a defeat of justice. "God is not a man, that He should lie; or the son of man, that He should repent" (Num. xxiii. 19), or change His mind. The punishment due to sin MUST be inflicted: the debt MUST be paid, even to the uttermost farthing.

Superficial thinkers have sometimes said, "The Lord's Prayer cannot have been intended for the use of the Christian Church in all ages, for it contains no allusion to the work of Christ: it is a prayer which a Jew, a Mohammedan, or even an absolute heathen might offer, as well as a Christian." And it is most true that the prayer is essentially human and catholic. But, just as we acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ to be the perfect type of humanity, and just as the "Catholic Church," in its legitimate acceptation, is *the gathering together in one all things in Christ* (Eph. i. 10), so the Lord's Prayer, if used with intelligence and fervency of spirit (for otherwise it is not prayer at all), is calculated to lead to Christ, for it evolves fundamental principles from which all the doctrines of the Gospel may be logically deduced. Thus the principle that God's will is the only right rule of human conduct, which no man disputes, leads to the doctrine of Christ's perfect right-

eousness, by which alone the Law is fulfilled. And, similarly, the principle that man is a sinner, and needs forgiveness, which no man disputes, leads to the doctrine that "Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust" (1 Pet. iii. 18). The very petition now under consideration involves the whole "mystery of godliness." How shall God be just, and yet forgive sinners? That is a question which an intelligent heathen might well ask, if he heard, or were himself bidden to offer, such a petition as this. He might well say, "God is just and true: but if He were to forgive sin, which He has expressly threatened to punish, He would be no longer either just or true!" And the Gospel of Christ gives the only solution of the mystery. It directs the sinner to the Cross of Christ, the tree on which the Prince of glory died, where mercy and truth met together, and where righteousness and peace kissed each other (Ps. lxxxv. 10). At the foot of the Cross we learn that it is not solely as an act of mercy that we ask God to forgive us our debts, but as an act of justice also —justice, namely, not to us as sinners, but to Christ, and to those who are in Christ. "If we confess our sins, God is FAITHFUL and JUST to forgive us our sins," for the punishment has been endured, and the debt has been paid, by our Redeemer. The believer in Jesus, cleansed from his natural and actual defilement by the blood and the water of the Covenant, and covered with the spotless robe of "Jehovah our Righteousness," is thus enabled to stand before God, not on his own merits, which are fabulous, but on the merits of Christ, which are verities; and he receives not merely a full acquittance from his debt, but a positive title to the inheritance of glory and joy in that everlasting kingdom, for the coming of which he prays.

We are taught to ask, then, not for an act of sovereign

condonation, which God could not grant without denying Himself, which is impossible (2 Tim. ii. 13), but to ask that God, for the sake of what His SON Jesus Christ hath done and suffered, would freely pardon all our sins. *Freely pardon;* for though it is a glorious truth that Christ has purchased our pardon, and though HE can claim it as an act of justice to Himself, yet it must not be forgotten that towards man it is an act of free grace. The work of Christ brought God under no obligation to show mercy to us; for God cannot be subject to any coercion of His will. To use the language of Zanchius, "The Deity is possessed not only of infinite knowledge, but likewise of absolute liberty of will; so that whatever He does or permits to be done, He does and permits freely and of His own good pleasure." * But though the work of Christ does not bring God under obligation to show mercy, yet, forensically speaking, it takes away the obstacle. It is God's will to show mercy; but His own truth and justice formed a legal barrier. That barrier being removed by Christ, the mercy of God goes forth freely; He chooses, of His own great love wherewith He loved us, to raise us from death and give us a crown of life. Through Jesus Christ, therefore, is preached unto all men the forgiveness of sins. The responsibility rests upon every man that hears this free proclamation, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts xvi. 31); and if any man be not saved, it is solely because he will not come to Christ that he may have life.

This coming to Christ, however, is precisely what the natural man is most unwilling to do. Men think complacently of mercy without an atonement, an idea entirely congenial to the diseased sentimentalism which passes for Christianity with those who are content with

* JEROME ZANCHIUS on Predestination, translated by Toplady.

superficial inquiries, but altogether inconsistent with the character of God as revealed in His Word. He expressly declares that "without shedding of blood," that is, without the death of an expiatory victim, "there is no remission" (Heb. ix. 22); yet, in defiance of this plain testimony, we find men, arrogantly styling themselves "Rational Christians," turning away in a rage from the Gospel, which, though it does level human pride and pretension to the dust, offers forgiveness and eternal life in a manner that gives all the glory to God, and is full of grace and truth towards man. Is this rational? Is this wise? Was Naaman wise when he turned away in a rage, because in his estimation the rivers of Damascus were better than all the waters of Israel? Was not the proud Syrian leper obliged, after all, to go and wash in the Jordan? So, many a proud sinner, after years of darkness and delusion, has been brought, in very despair, to the foot of the Cross. Alas! poor, proud, ignorant man! Instead of stumbling at that stumbling-stone, and making it a rock of offence, should we not rather be filled with gratitude and love to Him who, at so unspeakable a sacrifice, hath broken the bars of our prison-house, and opened for ever the gates of Life and Light! Instead of being ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, which makes foolish the wisdom of this world, should we not rather glory in it, and not think it too much to present our bodies daily as living sacrifices unto Him who hath thus saved us, and called us with a holy calling!

But now let us give heed to a FOURTH lesson taught by this petition. While we are taught to ask for the free forgiveness of our debts for Christ's sake, we are required to add, "as we forgive our debtors," or, according to S. Luke, "for we also forgive every one that is

indebted to us." In ver. 14, "our debtors" are explained to mean those who trespass against us; and accordingly the whole petition is frequently expressed thus: "And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us."

It is clear that before we can ask for the forgiveness of our own debts to God, or trespasses against His Law, we must forgive our debtors, those, namely, who are indebted to us in the same sort that we ourselves are indebted to God, namely, for injuries, insults, offences, or disobediences, which cannot be cancelled or expiated by any effort of the debtor. The petition has no reference to ordinary pecuniary debts. If one man is indebted to another, either in money, or goods, or labour, and is able to pay or perform what he owes, though it may be not without considerable inconvenience, neither justice nor mercy requires the creditor to forgive such a debt. The whole of this world's lawful business is made up of obligations between man and man, as buyer and seller, borrower and lender, master and servant; and the operations of commerce would speedily be brought to a close if men were not compelled to fulfil their contracts. At the same time, even here, the petition teaches forbearance. We may not press even our lawful claims to the utter ruin of a debtor. We may not take the nether or the upper millstone, or a widow's raiment, to pledge (Deut. xxiv. 6, 17); we may not grind the faces of the poor: if he cannot pay, why should we take his flesh? Let us rather forgive, as God hath forgiven us.

The petition, however, has reference to debts which cannot be estimated by a pecuniary value, and which cannot therefore be paid. There are occasions, no doubt when the public weal requires that offenders against the person or reputation of others should be punished. A

Christian may find it his duty to be a prosecutor in such a case; but he must take heed that he is actuated by no vindictive feeling, but simply by a regard for public justice. The discharge of a public duty is quite consistent with personal forgiveness towards an offender. A father may find it necessary, for the maintenance of due authority and order in his family, to chastise a disobedient child; but such chastisement is not a proof of vindictiveness, but of love. And the same sentiment ought to be entertained by any who on public grounds are compelled to take legal proceedings against others. But where the offence affects only ourselves personally, and is not of such magnitude as to affect the public interest; wherever, in short, we can be merciful as God is merciful—that is, at our own cost, and not at the cost of others,—in all such cases the petition teaches us to accord full and free forgiveness.

But in what sense is the latter clause of the petition to be understood in relation to the former clause? What is the precise force of the particle "AS?"

We may be sure that it is not to be understood in the sense of "because." We do not ask forgiveness for ourselves *because* we forgive others: we cannot allege any plea of merit: we cannot by forgiving others entitle ourselves to claim forgiveness from God. In this way it would be very easy for a rich man, or for a man of a naturally indulgent temper, to enter the kingdom of heaven. But the truth, the humiliating truth, is, that no human action whatever *can* have any merit in the eyes of God. Forgiveness of injuries may be, and often is, a very pleasing evidence of divine love in the heart, which love in itself is an evidence, the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, (Rom. viii. 16), and have received the forgiveness of our

heavenly Father; but in no sense, and under no circumstances, can it be a claim of merit, or an argument which a sinful man may lawfully use in pleading with God.

A more common way of interpreting the clause is to take it as indicating a kind of *proportion* between the forgiveness we show to others, and the forgiveness we ask of God for ourselves; as though we should say, "Forgive us our debts *to the same extent* that we forgive our debtors." To this interpretation, however, there is the objection, that forgiveness does not admit of degrees. It is either full and free, or it is not forgiveness. To forgive, and not to forget—that is, still to cherish a grudge, or to forgive with conditions, is not really to forgive. It is not a qualified and reluctant forgiveness, but free and full forgiveness, that we ask; and it is such forgiveness that we are required to give.

It appears necessary, therefore, to interpret this clause as *a profession or declaration of forgiveness.* The use of the indefinite past tense * seems to imply that the forgiveness of others is complete on our part before we ask forgiveness for ourselves, or that, in obedience to the injunction of the former chapter, we have been reconciled to our brother before we come to the altar ourselves. Our forgiveness of others gives us no *right* to ask for ourselves; but the want of such forgiveness positively disqualifies us from asking. If we can truly say that we have forgiven others, we may feel from such consciousness an encouragement to approach the throne for ourselves. If we can with sincerity profess that we forgive our debtors, we may with a clear conscience ask God to forgive us, not *because* we forgive, but for Christ's sake, and because our having been enabled from the heart to forgive others is a proof that we belong to

* ἀφήκαμεν, a better reading than ἀφίεμεν.

Christ, and have a right to ask in His Name. The man, on the contrary, who cannot say from his heart that he forgives others, must needs have a very slender conception of his own need of forgiveness; and in the mouth of such a man a prayer for forgiveness can only be a mockery. He who harbours revengeful or uncharitable sentiments cannot have been urged by a sense of his own sinfulness and nakedness to flee to the Cross for pardon and refuge. Such a man has not on the wedding-garment of humility and faith, in which all that come to the Gospel feast are expected to present themselves, not indeed as a qualification, but as an evidence of love and devotion to the Great Founder of the feast, the absence of which condemns the presumptuous guest to ignominious extrusion.

It has been already said, that in praying for the forgiveness of our debts *as* we forgive our debtors, we do not ask a *proportionate* forgiveness, which means no forgiveness at all; but, nevertheless, this clause of the petition does imply, as our Lord Himself teaches, a very awful alternative. It implies, that if we do not forgive our fellow-men their trespasses against us, we must not expect that our heavenly Father will forgive us. To offer this petition while we are conscious in our hearts that we do not forgive others, is in the most emphatic manner to disclaim the forgiveness we presume to ask, and to imprecate the Divine vengeance on our heads. This lesson our Lord has taught even more forcibly in the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matt. xviii. 23–35). The servant owed his lord ten thousand talents, an enormous sum, which it was impossible for him to pay. But his lord was moved with compassion, and forgave him the debt. The sequel teaches a striking lesson of the effect produced by forgiveness without

atonement. Such forgiveness does not beget love in the heart of the forgiven to the forgiver; still less does it prompt to obedience; it rather begets a feeling of escape from obligation,—a feeling of liberty to sin with impunity,—a proud, presumptuous, self-sufficient spirit. The same servant went out, and found a fellow-servant that owed him a trifling sum, of which he demanded payment with threats and violence, refusing any respite, and casting his debtor into prison. His lord, on hearing of his conduct, was justly indignant, and said to him, "O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?" The hopeless imprisonment, the impossible payment of the uttermost farthing, to which this unmerciful man was condemned, was the appropriate punishment of his own inclemency; and it teaches us not only what we may expect, but what we actually imprecate upon ourselves, when we use this petition, if we from our hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

On the other hand, the daily offering of this prayer in a right spirit cannot fail to have the effect of keeping us humble and watchful over our own hearts, and of keeping alive within us sentiments of charity towards others. Daily forgiveness is as needful for our souls as daily bread for our bodies; indeed, as has been forcibly said, "Our daily bread does but feed us as lambs for the slaughter, if our sins be not forgiven."* Nor do we pray for our own sins alone, but also for the sins of others. Each man is, no doubt, responsible for his own sins; "every man shall bear his own burden;" but at the same time all are exhorted to "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. vi. 2, 5),

* Matthew Henry.

namely, in loving each other as He loved us. "If any man sin," it is not so much the sinner that has an advocate, but we his brethren; "WE have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John ii. 1). And how should the consciousness of our own guilt, and of the magnitude of the debt which God has forgiven us—not gratuitously, but because Christ has paid it in full—how should this great love of God stir us up to active zeal and effort in His cause! How should it quench within our hearts every spark of wrath, malice, and uncharitableness towards our brethren of mankind! How profoundly should we feel, that if we were able to pour the treasures of the world at the feet of the Saviour, to devote our whole lives to His service, and to give our bodies to the flames for His Name's sake and the Gospel's, it would be as nothing in comparison with what we have received!

## XXVII.

## THE LORD'S PRAYER—(*concluded*).

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil;
"For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."—MATT. vi. 13.

IN the Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer, the first of the two petitions that relate to our spiritual necessities, we are taught to ask God to forgive us our debts, trespasses, or sins, against Himself; a blessing which, however, we are not encouraged to ask, unless by His grace we are enabled to say from our heart that we, on our part, freely and fully forgive them that trespass against us. And since forgiveness is what we all need for the past; since we have never, in all our past lives, either thought, said, or done of ourselves any one thing that did not require to be sprinkled with the cleansing blood of the Covenant, and to be forgiven for the sin that was mingled with it; so, in all our future lives, we know that at every moment we shall need the preserving and guiding, the sustaining and comforting hand of God. This fatherly care, if sought in humility and faith, we may expect to obtain; and it is for this that we are taught to ask in the SIXTH and concluding petition of the Lord's Prayer, which now claims our attention.

The words "tempt" and "temptation" are used in Scripture in two senses, which it is necessary carefully to distinguish. In the common usage of the English language, "temptation" means *the direct suggestion of sinful thoughts, words, or actions*, of which our Lord's temptation in the wilderness is a complete and prominent example. In this sense, it must be evident God cannot tempt man; and to pray that He would not lead us into temptation of this kind would involve a supposition revolting and blasphemous in the highest degree. Against the possibility of a misconception so gross the Apostle James warns us—"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (Jam. i. 13, 14). It is by the evil propensities of our flesh and of our fleshly mind, that is, of our entire fallen and corrupt nature, roused to activity by the malignant promptings of Satan, that we are tempted to sin; and thus the Apostle adds (ver. 15), "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished"—that is, when the overt act of transgression has been completed, or when the end of a sinful course has been attained—"bringeth forth death,"—ends, namely, in the eternal death of both soul and body.

But though it is inaccurate to say that the motions of sin, which are in our own members, proceed from God, and that thus God not only tempts us to sin, but becomes Himself the author of sin;* yet there is another

* Of course, in a dogmatical and transcendental sense, God is the Author of all things. "It is His free pleasure to permit sin; since, without His permission, neither men nor devils can do anything."—ZANCHIUS.

"Those things which seemingly thwart the Divine will are nevertheless agreeable to it, for if God did not permit them they could not be done; and whatever God permits He permits freely and willingly. He does

sense in which it cannot be doubted that temptation does come from God. In its strict literal and etymological sense, "temptation" signifies a *trial*, or *testing*, of anything. In the Scriptures it usually means, as applied to men, *a testing of their faith and obedience;* and it is frequently used with reference to those afflictions, reproaches, and persecutions which the people of Christ are called to endure in this world, that the genuineness of their discipleship may be put to the proof. Thus in the chapter from which a quotation has already been made, the Apostle James says, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trial" (literally, the *proving*,) "of your faith worketh patience." From which it is clear that the various temptations to which we are exposed in this world are intended as trials or "assays" of our faith. To this the Apostle Paul testifies: "We glory," saith he, "in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh" (produceth) "patience, and patience experience," or *proof by experiment* (Rom. v. 3, 4). Likewise S. Peter saith, "Ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than" (the trial) "of gold that perisheth, though it be tried" (or *assayed*) "with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. i. 6, 7).

It appears then, not only that God does frequently

nothing, neither suffers anything to be done, against His own will."—AUGUSTINE.

"It is true that He has positively willed the creation into existence; and thus, with all its necessary defects and disorders, hath He given birth to an infinite and overpassing blessedness. All the blessedness and all the virtue proceed from Himself; all the misery, and all the sins, or, privatively speaking, all the shortcomings, proceed from the essential defectibility of the creature.—CHALMERS' *Inst. Theol.*

lead His people into temptation, or place them in circumstances and situations in which their faith and obedience will be sorely tested, but that He bids them rejoice when they are thus tempted, and regard the temptation as a means of promoting their growth in the Divine life, and of strengthening their experience of the Divine love. It was with this view that God did tempt Abraham, when He bade him take his beloved Isaac, the seed of the promises, and offer him up for a burnt-offering. It was, indeed, a most perplexing mandate. This was the very son of whom it had been said, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Gen. xxi. 12); and yet he was commanded to slay him with his own hand. To shed the blood of man was ordinarily a heinous crime: it was an aggravation of the difficulty in this case that the victim was to be his own son, his beloved son, the son of so many prayers and of such illustrious faith; but the climax of the marvel was that he, who had been specially chosen from among his idolatrous relatives and neighbours as a witness for the pure faith and worship of the living and true Jehovah, should be commanded to perform one of the worst of those abominations for which the Gentiles were condemned, namely, to immolate his child as a sacrifice to God. Yet the faith of Abraham stood this crucial test. He most wisely deemed that God's commandments were not to be questioned, and that where the command was plain and positive, unreasoning obedience was the highest reason. He doubted not that God was able to perform all that He had promised, even though the particular channel through which the promise was to reach its fulfilment were destroyed. He believed that God was able even to raise his son from the dead, and doubted not that He would do so, rather than the word of His covenant should fail (Gen. xvii. 21). He was strong in faith, and

staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; the sacrificial knife was raised in the father's hand, and then—then the answer of God came, and the triumph of faith was complete (Gen. xxii. 1–18).

The case of Abraham's trial affords a perfect illustration of the manner in which God tempts His people, or leads them into temptation, and also of His design in thus tempting them. It is unnecessary to multiply examples, though the histories of Job and David, and the history of the primitive Church, supply them in abundance. Our blessed Lord distinctly foretold His disciples that in the world they should have tribulation: that they should be hated of all men for His Name's sake. And so fully were these assurances realized by the primitive Christians, that we find a great part of the apostolic epistles occupied with encouragements to steadfastness under temptations to apostasy. S. Paul teaches believers that their chastisements were proofs that God dealt with them as with sons; "for what son," he asks, "is he whom the father chasteneth not?" (Heb. xii. 7.) And he entreats them, saying, "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward" (x. 35). To the same effect writes S. Peter: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Pet. iv. 12, 13).

But besides the reproach of the Cross, which may be taken as a general term including all temptations of the highest kind into which we are led for Christ's sake and the Gospel's, we are daily and hourly liable to be led into temptations inferior in degree, but calculated severely to test our faith and obedience. Obedience itself is the

best test of a living faith; and hence the temptations of our daily life are usually temptations to disobedience. Take, for illustration, the law of the Sabbath. A Christian is engaged, let us suppose, in lawful business from morning to night during six days of the week; and when the LORD'S day comes, he is not disposed to rise early and seek communion with God, or to devote the whole day to the public and private exercises of His worship: he is tempted, both by his own self-indulgent heart, and by the solicitations of friends or companions, to relax his mind by worldly conversation, and to recreate his body by an excursion to the country, or the like. The question practically proposed to the Christian here is a test of his obedience: "Shall I seek my own pleasure, think my own thoughts, speak my own words, on the LORD'S holy day; or shall I keep the Sabbath-day, to sanctify it, as the LORD my God hath commanded me?" If he really love God who first loved him, he will cheerfully choose the way of obedience, for in Him he will find his chief joy, and in the ordinances of His sanctuary his choicest recreations; he would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of his God than be surrounded by the most fascinating worldly society, or revel in the most sumptuous of earth's palaces. What God's law prescribes as a duty, the true believer does, not from fear or constraint, but because he loves to do it, and has found by experience that in keeping of God's commandments there is great reward (Ps. xix. 11). They who come to the courts of the LORD merely because it is a duty can rarely be acceptable worshippers; for though present in body, they are usually absent in spirit, their hearts being in their counting-houses, or in their farms, or ships, or in the theatre, or ball-room, according to the peculiar tastes of each. The true believer is not insensible to the advantages of recreation

both to the mind and body, and is just as liable to feel the irksomeness of constant toil and confinement as the veriest worldling. But the times for recreation he lays his account to find in the six days which God has given for worldly employments, and will suffer nothing to interfere with the spiritual rest of the LORD'S day, or to abridge those holy exercises which are to him a delight, holy of the LORD, and honourable; which are the very type and antepast of heaven itself.

The rest of the Ten Commandments might be taken up consecutively in a similar way. A temptation to a transgression of any one of them is really a trial of faith. Into such temptations the providence of God does sometimes, yea frequently, lead us; for such temptations are a necessary part of our discipline, and are essential to the due development of Christian experience. A difficulty thus arises. If it be true that God sees it to be needful to try our faith by leading us into temptation; if such trials are intended to promote our growth in grace; and if we are therefore called to rejoice and be exceeding glad when such trials are sent upon us,—how is it that, in the petition under consideration, we are taught to pray, "Lead us not into temptation?"

The question is perfectly legitimate; and the answer is, that whatever advantages may result from such trials of faith as have a successful issue, no man can be warranted in desiring that his faith may be exposed to trial, or in presuming that he shall be able to endure the test. Trials are beneficial when faithfully borne; but how can any man feel so confident that his faith will not fail, as that he should pray for the trial to be sent? It is one thing to bear ourselves manfully when the hour of temptation comes, and quite another thing to court temptation in the presumptuous assurance that we shall

come off victorious. The early Christians had so great ambition of the crown of martyrdom, that they not unfrequently denounced themselves to the heathen authorities, and voluntarily exposed themselves to trials, from which some of them, after much boasting, ignominiously shrank. And so, many a young Christian, in the ardour of his first love, when he has but newly donned his harness, has boasted himself like one that was about to put it off, and fancied himself more than a conqueror, when he has never fought a single field, or encountered any serious temptation. Can we wonder that such novices, being lifted up with pride, have fallen into the condemnation of the devil? The experienced believer, who knows the depths of Satan, and knows his own infirmities, will rather pray that he may be kept back from presumptuous sins. He will have a godly distrust of himself, and while praying daily that he may not be led into temptation, he will be all the better prepared to do battle valiantly when the assault really comes.

The petition, therefore, teaches us to hate sin, and to cherish a wholesome apprehension of every occasion of it. It encourages us to pray that God would either wholly keep us out of all situations in which we may be tempted to sin; or, if He see it to be good for us that our faith should be tried, that He will, according to His promise, suffer no temptation to happen to us greater than our ability, but that, with the temptation, He will also make a way of escape, that we may be able to bear it (1 Cor. x. 13). We are warned against the presumption of rushing into temptation; for nothing can be a greater mockery than for a man to pray that he may not be led into temptation, and then of his own accord to tempt God by going into scenes, or into company, in which he knows he will be tempted. We are taught to

be on our guard against the secret or open attacks of the enemy, maintaining a humble dependent spirit, a spirit of watchfulness and prayer that we may not enter into temptation. We are also taught to beware lest we ourselves become tempters of others, "children that are corrupters" (Isa. i. 4), endeavouring by word or deed to beguile our brother into sin. And finally, the petition teaches us to beware of tempting the Lord our God by imperilling either our bodies or our souls, in the expectation of being delivered (Deut. vi. 16; Matt. iv. 7). God promises to deliver His people from temptations which He sends upon them, or into which He leads them: not from those to which they rashly expose themselves.

The second part of the petition, "Deliver us from evil," is the necessary counterpart, and at the same time an expansion of the first. Some prefer to read it, "Deliver us from the evil one;" but this is not so necessary here as in another passage, sometimes supposed to be parallel to this petition, in which S. Paul exhorts Christians to take the shield of faith, that they may be able to quench all the fiery darts of the WICKED, where there is an evident allusion to the personal agency of the wicked ONE, the god of this world. A closer parallel may be found in our Lord's prayer for His disciples on the night before His Passion: "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil," namely, from all the evil that is in the world. Such seems to be the meaning of "evil" in this petition: and, indeed, whether we refer the expression to Satan himself, the direct agent in every evil work, natural or spiritual, or to the evil itself which is wrought by him, the sense is not materially affected. It is a mistake, however, to restrict

the second part of the petition to the particular forms of evil indicated in the first part. We do, no doubt, pray, that if God, for our profit, should see fit to lead us into temptation, He would at the same time provide for our deliverance. But this is not all. It is a comprehensive prayer for deliverance from everything that is evil—evil spirits, evil men, evil thoughts, evil words, evil works, evil influences of every kind. It is the echo of the cry of the whole creation groaning and travailing together in pain under the bondage of corruption, and earnestly expecting the manifestation of the sons of God (Rom. viii. 21–23). It is the cry of an immortal spirit imprisoned in a tabernacle of clay, groaning under its burden, and earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with the house that is from heaven (2 Cor. v. 2–4). It is a very elevating and purifying thought, that, if the evil hour should come, we shall be strengthened to abide the shock, seeing that they who are for us are more and mightier than they that are against us, and that our bodies and our souls are alike under the protection of Him without whom not one sparrow falls to the ground. But it is even more elevating and purifying to look beyond this evil world altogether, to look to the perpetual end of the enemy's destructions (Ps. ix. 6), and the final restitution of all things, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord (Acts iii. 19–21). It cannot be doubted that the language of the petition is intended to be understood in the largest sense of which it is capable, as otherwise it would not be in harmony with the other parts of the prayer, which contemplate the utter destruction of Satan's kingdom, and the regeneration of the world under the benign sceptre of Immanuel. The prayer, "Deliver us from evil," will not cease to be the cry of God's believing people, and it will not have been answered, until the last enemy shall

have been destroyed, until mortality shall have been swallowed up of life, and until that saying shall have been accomplished which is written, "He will swallow up death in victory!" (Isa. xxv. 8; comp. 1 Cor. xv. 26, 54; 2 Cor. v. 4.)

The Lord's Prayer, according to the received text of the New Testament, concludes with a doxology, or solemn ascription of praise to God. This formula is wanting in the prayer as given in S. Luke's Gospel, and is not found in any ancient manuscript of authority. The practice of concluding or combining prayers with doxologies was, however, sanctioned in the Jewish Church, as is evident from numerous examples that occur in the Old Testament (1 Chron. xxix. 10–19; 2 Sam. vii. 18–29; and throughout the Psalms.) Similar examples are frequent in the apostolic writings (Eph. iii. 20, 21; Heb. xiii. 20, 21; &c.) The practice is highly reasonable in itself; and thus it is not difficult to understand how this doxology came by degrees to be considered as of equal authority with the rest of the prayer, and so to be inserted in the text of the later MSS.* At the same time, while the inexorable canons of criticism oblige us to reject the doxology from the inspired text, there is no objection to the use of it, more especially as a form of prayer in public worship. The substance of it is entirely scriptural, the several parts of it being found in other places of undoubted genuineness (Ps. xxii. 28; 2 Chron. xx. 6; Num. xiv. 21; Rom. xi. 36; &c.); we need not hesitate, therefore, to accept the teaching which it conveys.

* See the question of the genuineness of the doxology fully discussed in the notes of Bloomfield and Alford. Independently of manuscript authority, the objection founded on the interruption which the doxology effects between vers. 12, 13, and ver. 14, is fatal to its genuineness.

The use of such a formula implies a profession on the part of the suppliant that he takes encouragement to pray from God alone, and founds his hope of being heard and answered entirely on God's revealed character. Every man that really prays, and does not content himself with merely "saying prayers," expects an answer to his petitions. Unbelief is, indeed, ready to insinuate that prayer is useless; that if we obtain our desire, it will not be because we have prayed; that if we do not obtain it, it will not be because we have not prayed. To counteract these malignant suggestions of the evil one, it is well to keep before our minds the direct encouragements to prayer which God has scattered throughout His Word, and also those indirect encouragements which may be obtained by meditation on His character as exhibited in the scheme of redemption. When we look to God as He is manifested in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses; when we look to the marvellous harmony of the Divine attributes displayed in the cross of Christ; and when we refresh our souls by the remembrance of His exceeding great and precious promises, especially as these are held forth to our spiritual view in the ordinances of His Church,—it is impossible not to feel that if God be true, prayer is not offered in vain, but that, "if we ask anything according to His will He heareth us" (1 John v. 14).

Strange to say, however, mankind are for the most part disposed to take encouragement in prayer, not from God, but from themselves. Many entertain the notion that they ought not to pray or engage in the more solemn ordinances of religion until they have qualified themselves by acquiring an increased holiness of life and conversation. And when they have, in pursuance of this notion, exerted themselves to make clean the out-

side of the cup and platter, they take encouragement from their own efforts, and imagine that God will be more disposed to hear their prayers for this same outside cleansing. Even more advanced Christians find it not easy to repress the fancy, which arises from the old Adam still clinging to them, and warring against the law of their new and better being, that their outward works do give them in some sort a claim to be heard; and in spite of themselves they find their deceitful hearts resting on this vain imagination, rather than on the sure Word of truth. The last thing that the regenerate man surrenders is the belief in his own righteousness—if, indeed, this belief is ever wholly surrendered; for this is the very battle-field of Satan, which he contests, inch by inch, so long as we are in this earthly tabernacle. So long as a believer retains any confidence in his own holiness, or in his own merits, of what kind soever, he can never be perfectly holy: so long as he fancies he can qualify himself for worshipping God acceptably, he will never be qualified. It is precisely at the moment when we know and feel ourselves to be utterly vile and worthless, having no title whatever to God's favour, that we are in a position to lay hold of the hem of the Saviour's garment, and to seek acceptance through Him alone.

This doxology teaches us to pray, and to expect an answer to our prayers, not because we ourselves have, or can have, any claim to approach the throne of grace, but because He whom we worship is the sovereign LORD, to whom alone belong the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. The dominion is His: therefore He has a right to give what He wills, and to whom He wills. The power is His: therefore He is able to do whatsoever His hand and His counsel determine to do. The glory also is His: and inasmuch as God's glory is His holi-

ness (Exod. xv. 11; Isa. vi. 3), we have herein the strongest assurance that His dealings with us are not dictated by caprice, but that the Judge of all the earth must do what is right. The infinite love displayed in the unspeakable gift of His Son hath made the forgiveness of sins, in any case where He may choose to exercise it, a just and righteous thing; and this is what we are encouraged to believe He is ready to do unto all that come unto Him in His Son's Name. To God alone, therefore, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, belongs all the glory of our redemption, for He is alone the author of every successive step by which His people are conducted in the path of the Divine life, from grace to grace, and from glory to glory.

The doxology also teaches us, that in our prayers we should praise God. It is sometimes difficult to draw a precise line between praise and prayer, or to say where the one ends and the other begins. The devout heart finds ready utterance for both, and almost unconsciously mingles both in the same act of worship. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. xii. 34); and when the lips of him that prayeth give glory to God and the Saviour whom his soul loveth, there can be no doubt that his heart is simply uttering its appropriate language. There is, however, a danger to be avoided here. Prayers are sometimes offered in public, one-third of which, if not more, consists solely of the language of adoration, in which God is told how great and glorious He is, and what great and glorious things He hath done, with a degree of iteration very near akin to the "battology" of the heathen, which our Lord has so strongly condemned. A due proportion is to be observed; and in this, as in all other respects, the Lord's Prayer, with the doxology subsequently added to it, affords an instructive model.

The prayer concludes with the word AMEN.

This word is Hebrew, and is either a noun, signifying "truth," or an adverb, signifying "truly," "certainly," "so be it." We read in the prophet Isaiah (lxv. 16), "He that sweareth shall swear by the *God of truth*" (literally, the GOD OF AMEN). And the people under the old dispensation were taught to say "Amen" at the end of their prayers and doxologies, especially of those offered publicly by an officiating minister as the spokesman of the congregation, in token that they all adopted the prayer, and offered it each man for himself. So also, on the stated occasions when the curses of the law were publicly rehearsed, the people were required to signify their assent by audibly answering "Amen" (Deut. xxvii. 15–26; comp. Jer. xi. 5).

The practice of responding "Amen" at the close of prayers prevailed in the Apostolic Churches, as is evident from 1 Cor. xiv. 16, where S. Paul argues against offering prayer or thanksgiving in an unknown tongue, on the ground that it is impossible for those who do not understand the language in which the prayer is offered to say "Amen" to it. That the practice was universal in the Primitive Church is also evident from the writings of the Christian fathers. It was also the practice of the earlier Reformed Churches; and was only discontinued by the Puritans in the seventeenth century, in their zeal to make themselves in all respects different from the Romish and Anglican Churches. In many of the congregations which trace their denominational origin to the Puritan age, the practice has been revived of late years, and probably nothing but the force of habit prevents it from becoming general. It is on every ground desirable that congregations should be encouraged to utter an audible "Amen," not loudly, but fervently, at the close of a prayer, and occasionally even during its progress.

It is a token of intelligence and sympathy; a most cheering and welcome evidence to the officiating minister that he is not praying alone, but that the words he utters really bear the burden of the people to the throne of the heavenly grace. It is a drop of the holy oil which binds the multitude of them that believe together as members of one body, and shows them to be of one heart and one soul. It shows that Christian worship is what it professes to be, a communion of saints. The very knowledge that a worshipper is expected to say "Amen" to the prayer offered, operates as an incentive and help to close and earnest attention, and as a protection against roving thoughts, of which it seems highly inexpedient that Christians should be deprived; but such is the *vis inertia* of that "conservation" which perpetuates customs, no matter how unreasonable, simply because they are customs, and rejects every proposed improvement, however commendable, simply because it is at variance with existing customs, that probably some years may have to elapse before this godly practice shall again be, as it once was, the practice of the whole Visible Catholic Church.

That the practice has been abused, as every other scriptural practice has been abused, by hypocritical and formal worshippers, is, unhappily, too true. We must, therefore, be on our guard against such abuse, by not suffering the practice to degenerate into a mere form. Nothing can be a greater mockery than to say "Amen," when there is no assent either of the understanding or of the heart—nay, when perhaps there has been no devout attention bestowed upon the exercise of which it pretends to be the close. He who says "Amen" without real fervency of spirit, may impose upon his fellow-men, but He that searcheth the hearts knows that he has lied unto the Holy Ghost: he has not lied unto men, but

unto God. AMEN is the name of God: it is the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is "the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness" (Rev. iii. 14); and the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh HIS NAME in vain!

Let us seek that we may pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit; and in testimony of our sincerity, and of assurance that God will really answer us, let us say, not only in our hearts, but with our voices also, "AMEN!"

## XXVIII.

## FASTING.

"Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

"But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;

"That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."—MATT. vi. 16–18.

OUR blessed Lord's instructions on the subject of our spiritual duties are confined to the three heads of Alms-doing, Prayer, and Fasting, the two former of which have been considered. Our attention is now invited to the subject of Fasting; a subject seldom spoken of in this age of progress either from the pulpit or through the press; and a subject on which very erroneous opinions prevail. Some professedly Christian Churches make a large proportion of their religious duties consist in the observance of particular times and seasons of fasting, or partial abstinence from food; while others, apparently from a desire to be as unlike the former class as possible, have almost, if not altogether, discontinued the practice. It will probably be found in this, as in so many other cases, that the truth lies in the midst.

Our Lord gives no positive command to fast, as He gives no positive command to do alms, or to pray. All

three are the suggestions of natural religion, which teaches men not only to approach God in direct acts of worship, but also to give evidence of the sincerity of their approaches by communicating to others, according to their ability, the benefits they have individually received, and also by humbling their bodies as well as their souls in the presence of God. Hence, alms-doing, prayer, and fasting, are not peculiar to Christianity. They are enjoined, to a greater or less extent, by all forms of religion. The Word of God throughout takes for granted that all men making any pretence to religious principle do these things, or at least acknowledge it to be their duty to do them. And, accordingly, the Word gives directions, not so much that these things should be done, as how to do them in a right and effectual manner; the directions being accompanied with many precious promises and encouragements to those who thus by their good works give evidence of their faith and love.

Fasting, then, has its origin not in any positive command of God, but simply in a natural law. As on occasions of joy we naturally make feasts, and call together our friends and neighbours to rejoice with us; so on occasions of sorrow we are naturally disposed to retirement and fasting. Such is the sympathy between the body and the soul, that the pressure of a real and severe sorrow, or of great alarm and anxiety, takes away the desire for food. Under such pressure men have been known to abstain from all nutriment for periods under ordinary circumstances impossible. In such case the sufferer is merely obeying a physiological law, and cannot be said to be "fasting" in the religious sense of the term. (Compare Ps. cii. 4; Acts xxvii. 33.)

It is from this natural fasting, however, that religious fasting is derived. Sorrow for sin ought assuredly to be not less sincere and profound than sorrow for any earthly

loss or calamity; and while we are so sorrowing, nature itself prompts us to abstain from food, or at least to partake of it with moderation. It is difficult to imagine any man seriously mourning for sin, and humbling his soul before God in penitence and prayer, who does not at the same time restrict himself in the matter of diet. And thus we find that from the very earliest ages fasting has been regarded as a religious duty. The law of Moses did not indeed ordain any particular seasons for fasting; but the example of Moses himself, who fasted miraculously for forty days and nights while he was in the Mount alone with God, is a most emphatic recognition of the practice. We find also that Joshua and the elders of Israel continued prostrate before the ark for an entire day, putting dust upon their heads, and, it may be safely assumed, abstaining from food, of which they could not have partaken in the posture which they had assumed. Various other occasions are mentioned when fasting was observed. Among others may be noted the remarble case of Nineveh, the people of which great but wicked city solemnly repented when the prophet Jonah threatened them with the judgments of God, and proclaimed a fast, obliging even their cattle to refrain from food and water (Jonah iii. 5–8). The prophet Elijah observed a miraculous fast of forty days and forty nights during his journey from Beersheba to Mount Horeb (1 Kings xix. 8). The books of the Prophets and the Psalms abound in allusions to fasting, from which it is clear that, though the practice was not directly instituted by God, yet, being the dictate of nature, it was deemed commendable and acceptable when observed from right motives. (See Ps. xxxv. 13; lxix. 10; cix. 24; Nehem. ix. 1; Isa. lviii. 3–7; Jer. xiv. 12; Dan. ix. 3; Joel i. 14; ii. 12; Zech. vii. 5; viii. 19.) Turning to the New Testament, we find that our blessed Lord Himself, pre-

viously to His entering on His public ministry, was carried away by the Spirit into the wilderness, where He fasted forty days and forty nights, at the expiration of which period, with all the accumulated weight of that great hunger upon Him, He had to endure the assaults of the tempter. Our Lord during His ministry gave no positive injunction to fast, and appointed no seasons for the observance of that duty. When the Pharisees reproached Him because His disciples did not fast, as the disciples of John and they themselves habitually did, He did not vindicate them by declaring that it was wrong to fast, but said, "Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days" (Luke v. 34, 35). And on another occasion, when the disciples had failed to cast out an unclean spirit, our Lord told them that their failure was a proof of their unbelief, and that the kind of faith necessary for working such miracles was not to be expected without prayer and fasting: "This kind," said He, "goeth not out but by prayer and fasting" (Matt. xvii. 21). Accordingly we find that the Apostles, though they appointed no particular seasons for fasting, yet encouraged the practice both by precept and example. They kept under their bodies, and brought them into subjection; and we cannot doubt that by this discipline their souls were better prepared for the reception of Divine grace, and for the exercise of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit which were so largely imparted to them. (See 1 Cor. ix. 27; vii. 5; 2 Cor. vi. 5; xi. 27).

From all this it will appear that fasting not only follows natural laws, but has the sanction of the highest authority and example, and is entitled to be regarded as a spiritual duty as much as prayer and alms-doing.

Like these, however, it has been grossly abused. Among the Jews, the Sadducees treated it with contempt, regarding it as an evidence of superstition or hypocrisy; and it cannot be denied that the practices of the Essenes and of the Pharisees gave some pretext for that unfavourable opinion. The Essenes, who were an order of Pharisees, practised fasting and other austerities in remote places, separating themselves from human society, taking vows of celibacy, and refraining from the solemn feasts prescribed by the law of Moses.* Theirs was precisely the case so elaborately condemned by S. Paul in Col. ii. 18–23; the case, namely, of those whose religion had "a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body," while they refused obedience to the positive ordinances of God. For their defiance of the Divine law it was no valid apology that their lives were outwardly pure and continent; for by secluding themselves as they did, they evaded other and not less important obligations; and hence, notwithstanding its speciousness, and repute amongst men, the Apostle declares that such a religion is productive of no "honour to the satisfying of the flesh," or, in other words, it yields no full and permanent advantage or satisfaction suitable to the wants of human nature.† The Pharisees themselves, on the other hand, were the "hypocrites" against whom our Lord so frequently warned His disciples. They fasted frequently, as they observed other duties, to be seen of men. They appeared abroad with gloomy distorted visages, unwashen, unkempt, and sordidly attired, that they might appear unto men to fast, while the inner duty of humbling their souls before God was altogether neglected.

* Josephus, Bell. Jud., ii. 8, *sqq.*; Art. "Essenes," Kitto's Cyclop. Bibl. Lit.

† ALFORD on Col. ii. 23; Compare MEYER and ELLICOTT on same.

The corrupt practices of both Essenes and Pharisees have found imitators in the Visible Church of Christ. Previously to the downfall of the Western Roman Empire the Essenic asceticism had become very prevalent in the Church. Large numbers of the early Christians imagined they were doing God acceptable service by retiring from the haunts of men, and either dwelling in solitude, or in communities restricted to one sex, and bound together by vows of poverty and obedience. Thus originated the monastic system, which in later centuries became so powerful an engine in the hands of the Church of Rome, and which engendered and fostered the most flagrant abominations. In that apostate Church, also, the prescription by ecclesiastical authority of frequent special days of fasting and abstinence gave rise to hypocritical observances and abuses not less glaring than those of the Pharisees. A day of enforced and ostentatious abstinence, when the churches were draped in black, and the voice of sacred song was hushed in their worship, was succeeded by a day of gluttony and intemperance, miscalled a religious festival. Such excesses were not, of course, formally sanctioned by the Church; but they were the natural result of compulsory observances, in violation of the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free. Such "ordinances after the commandments and doctrines of men," "and not after Christ," could only serve to entangle men in a yoke of bondage far more oppressive than the law of Moses, which appointed no fasts at all, but left them to every man's private judgment and conscience.

These abuses, with many others, which had grown into monstrous proportions during several centuries of darkness and spiritual oppression, rendered the Reformation of the sixteenth century a great and imperative necessity. The great body of the Reformers concurred

as to the expediency of abolishing the numerous fasts with which the Romish Calendar was loaded, contenting themselves with recommending fasting as a means of edification and growth in grace, and leaving it to the competent authorities to determine the appointment of particular days for fasting and humiliation. The Church of England retained many of the old Romish fasts and feasts. It is still the law of that Church that every Friday should be observed as a fast, as well as the "forty days of Lent," and the eves or vigils preceding the chief feasts, such as Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Pentecost, and so forth. Though not formally abrogated, however, these fasts are regarded by the bulk of the members of the Anglican Church as a dead letter, and no attention whatever is paid to them, with the exception perhaps of the days called "Ash Wednesday" and "Good Friday." Some of the more zealous disciples of the Oxford Tractarian School, and their successors, the Ritualists, have attempted during the last thirty or forty years to revive within the Church of England the practice of what is still prescribed by the rubrics, together with other and much more objectionable practices, with the design, which they scarcely affect to conceal, of disseminating those very errors of the Church of Rome which called for the Reformation. Among the ignorant, and among those whose religious sensibilities are in the imagination rather than in the understanding, and who are easily persuaded that they have been eating bread when they have only been feeding on ashes (Isa. xliv. 20), these puerilities may create some temporary excitement, but they will not produce any lasting impression upon the sound-hearted common sense of the British people.

The Scottish Reformers, in common with the majority of their continental brethren and a large number of the

English Protestants, abolished all the fasts and feasts of the Romish Church, and relieved the Christian people from the galling yoke of anti-Christian usurpation. The following extract from the Appendix to the "Directory for the Publick Worship of God, agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster," may be taken as a succinct statement of the doctrine concerning "Days and Places for Publick Worship," held by the Presbyterian and Congregational denominations throughout the world, constituting the large majority of Protestant Christendom :—

"There is no day commanded in Scripture to be kept holy under the Gospel but the Lord's day, which is the Christian Sabbath.

"Festival days, vulgarly called *holy-days*, having no warrant in the Word of God, are not to be continued.

"Nevertheless, it is lawful and necessary, upon special emergent occasions, to separate a day or days for publick fasting or thanksgiving, as the several eminent and extraordinary dispensations of God's providence shall administer cause and opportunity to His people."

And in the "Directory" itself we find the following:—

"Besides solemn and general fasts enjoined by authority, we judge that at other times congregations may keep days of fasting, as Divine providence shall administer unto them special occasion; and also that families may do the same, so it be not on days wherein the congregation to which they do belong is to meet for fasting, or other publick duties of worship."

The Directory also defines a religious fast to mean "total abstinence from all food" (unless where bodily weakness renders some very sparing use of food necessary to support nature when ready to faint), as well as abstinence from worldly employments, conversation, and thoughts, and also from all worldly or bodily delights, even from such as are at other times lawful. The Reformed Churches have generally disallowed that distinction, the invention of a corrupt age, between "fasting" and "abstinence," the former term signifying total abstinence from all food, and the latter signifying

abstinence from flesh only. A religion which makes it a heinous sin to eat of butcher's meat, however sparingly, on Friday, yet allows the appetite to be satisfied with fish, in many parts of the world a rare and costly delicacy; which prohibits the use of suet or lard, even in the smallest quantity, but allows a restricted use of butter, milk, and eggs; which commands an absolute fast on Ash-Wednesday, the first day of Lent, but permits, or at least does not prohibit, the three preceding days, one of which is necessarily the Lord's day, to be spent in all the riotous excesses of a Roman or Venetian carnival; such a religion will hardly commend itself to the respect or confidence of any intelligent Christians. The absurdity is too gross and intense; and our sense of the ridiculous is restrained only by a sentiment of indignation on beholding so many millions of our race held in bondage by such preposterous superstitions, or driven for refuge to the barrens of speculative infidelity.

Having thus seen what is the teaching of Scripture and of the Reformed Churches on the subject of fasting, in opposition to the devices of carnal men, it is time to look at the actual practice of Protestant Christians in the present day.

Our forefathers of the Reformation period protested strongly against the unwarranted fasts and feasts of the Church of Rome, but they did not rush into the opposite extreme of neglecting altogether the observance of seasons of fasting and thanksgiving. The iconoclastic and simplifying tendencies of the English Puritans and Scottish Covenanters led them into some mistakes, and some excesses; but on this point they have given forth sound doctrine—doctrine professedly received by those Churches which adhere to the Westminster standards.

What, then, is the actual practice of those Churches in the present day? Generally speaking, the practice is, simply, not to fast at all, in the true and proper sense of the term. An impression seems to have become predominant that fasting is nothing more than the humbling of the soul, and that restrictions of diet are mere remnants of Popish or Pharisaic superstition; and the practice of literal fasting has consequently been rejected as unworthy of an age of progress. And it is not altogether an imaginary fear that, in this locomotive century, we have been led, not only to discontinue fasting in the bodily sense, but also to neglect that inward humiliation of soul which is undoubtedly the true end of fasting. For aught that appears, the majority of professing Christians make no distinction between a fast-day and any other day. If the fast-day be a public holiday, so far from its being observed as a day of humiliation, it is seized as a favourable opportunity for recreation and indulgence. As a general rule, there is little or no earnest attempt to observe fast-days as such, either bodily or spiritually; and the scanty attendance on the services of the sanctuary on such occasions proves that to the majority of ordinary worshippers the duty is distasteful. To what other conclusion, therefore, can we come, but that, in the hearts of a very large number of those who name the name of Christ, there must be a very slender consciousness of guilt and demerit before God, a very languid desire for that broken spirit which is to God a pleasing sacrifice, and very feeble aspirations after the blessedness of those that humble themselves under the mighty hand of God (1 Pet. v. 6).

Is there not, then, cause for deep regret that the practice of the Christian Church generally has so far degenerated from the practice of our godly forefathers?

In their laudable anxiety to escape from the trammels of superstition and hypocrisy, some Protestant communions have, it can scarcely be denied, fallen into opposite errors, not only in this matter of fasting, but in some other matters also, of an outward character indeed, but having nevertheless an important bearing on the progress of the Divine life in the soul. So long as we are in the body we cannot wholly remove ourselves from material influences, and ought not to attempt it; for neither our bodies nor our souls are our own, but God's, who hath bought us, body and soul, with a price, and has commanded us to glorify Him in our bodies and in our spirits, which are His (1 Cor. vi. 20).

There has been, accordingly, for some time, in the minds of those who have thought carefully upon the subject, a growing conviction that a return to the practice of our forefathers, so far as fasting at least is concerned, would be attended with most beneficial results. "I beseech you by the mercies of God," exclaims the Apostle, "that ye present your *bodies* as living sacrifices, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. xii. 1). Fasting, if observed in a right spirit, is undoubtedly one mode in which we may present our bodies as living sacrifices before God, whose we are, and whom we profess to serve. It is most true that the spiritual benefit to be derived from such sacrifices will depend not so much upon the rigour or protraction of the bodily abstinence, as upon the humiliation of soul that accompanies it. The chastening of the spirit is without doubt the end to be sought; but experience demonstrates that this end cannot be effectually accomplished without some chastening of the body.

That we may fast in a right spirit, the Word of God supplies us with ample directions. If our fast is private and personal, felt to be expedient for our own individual

discipline, and the subjugation of our own flesh, we must scrupulously keep the transaction a secret between God and our own souls. We must not appear abroad with distorted countenance or disordered apparel, so as to proclaim to men that we are fasting: it must be known only to our Father, which seeth in secret. Let a Christian who desires to possess his body in sanctification and honour (1 Thess. iv. 4) try the experiment of a private fast. Let him abstain from food, or eat nothing but the very simplest article of necessary aliment, for a day, or the greater part of a day, carefully guarding against the notion that there is anything intrinsically meritorious in such self-imposed privation. Let him use it simply as a means for withdrawing himself from the influence of carnal appetites and worldly affections, and fixing his thoughts more exclusively on things above. A few experiments of this kind will convince him of the benefit of the practice: the very feeling that he is denying himself for Christ's sake will have the effect, under the sought direction of the Holy Spirit, of drawing him more closely to the Saviour. He will feel himself subdued before God, enabled to sit more loose to the world, and capable of penetrating further into the things of the Spirit; and he will go forth from his retirement filled with new strength and ardour, that shall make him valiant in fight, and able, the Lord helping him, to put to flight the armies of the aliens (Heb. xi. 34).

With regard to public fasts, whether appointed by the civil magistrate to be observed by the whole population of any country, or by ecclesiastical authority to be observed by particular denominations or congregations, every Christian man ought to feel it both a solemn duty and a blessed privilege to observe such days holy to the LORD, and to encourage, by precept and

example, a similar observance of it by others. In times gone by, public fasts were frequently appointed by civil authority; and the rulers of the Churches, so far from jealously regarding such appointments as an intrusion into spiritual affairs, gladly concurred in them, and gave all their influence to promote their due observance. The Church of Rome pretends that the spiritual power of the Church is superior to the temporal power of the State, and denies the right of the civil government to appoint days of public fasting and thanksgiving. Among Protestants, also, a generation has arisen in these latter days which propounds the dogma that the only business the civil magistrate has with religion is "to let it alone," and consequently denies to him the right of appointing public fasts or thanksgivings. If the views advanced in these pages are correct, both Scripture and the standards of the Reformed Churches are opposed to this dogma. There is reason to believe that the systematic ignoring of religious responsibilities, which has been, and is, the policy of so many modern governments, especially in the Colonies, has been a very prolific source of that practical infidelity and of that low moral tone which characterize the popular mind in the present generation. If, however, it be the unwise policy of rulers to refrain from inviting us to unite in any public acknowledgment of the God whose kingdom is over all, it is to be hoped that the Churches will not fall into the like apathy. Above all, it is to be hoped that Christian congregations, and Christian men, sighing and crying in their secret chambers for the abominations of the times (Ezek. ix. 4), will be more earnest in their pleadings at the throne of grace, that God may not visit us according to our sins, but according to His own great and unmerited mercy.

A word, in conclusion, with more particular reference

to congregational fasts. In the olden days, when godly men thought and prayed more and spoke less than their descendants do now, it was the practice to set apart days of fasting whenever anything occurred affecting the spiritual interests of the congregation. The day of a minister's ordination or induction was observed as a fast; a most salutary regulation, founded on Apostolic practice (Acts xiii. 3, xiv. 23), but which, like too many salutary regulations of our fathers, if not actually and formally annulled, has fallen into utter desuetude. The practice still nominally prevails, in some Churches, of appointing a day of fasting and humiliation preparatory to the administration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper; but the fasting part of the observance has unhappily become a dead letter. Is this wise? Is this for edification? There may no doubt be a difficulty in suspending our daily business; but do we find the same difficulty on occasions of pleasure? And if the inconvenience were even greater than it is, ought not some sacrifice to be made in things pertaining to life and godliness, as cheerfully as we make them in things pertaining only to this world? Let us put this matter before our consciences. Have we, in this day, less cause for humiliation, self-examination, meditation in God's Word, and prayer, than our fathers had in their day? Let the experiment be fairly tried. When a congregational fast is appointed, let the experiment be tried of keeping a real fast, instead of a nominal one. No outward demonstration is necessary. The fast which the Lord hath chosen is not to bow the head as a bulrush, or to spread sackcloth under us: it is rather to afflict our souls before God, and by works of piety and charity, and the diligent waiting on the Lord in His own ordinances, to cherish in our hearts those dispositions which are essential, not only to the

worthy receiving of the Lord's Supper, but also to our steadfast advancement in the path of the just (Prov. iv. 18).

"Fasting," says Jeremy Taylor, "designed for repentance, must be ever joined with an extreme care that we fast from sin; for there is no greater folly or indecency in the world than to commit that for which I am now judging and condemning myself. This is the best fast; and the other may serve to promote the interest of this, by increasing the disaffection to it, and multiplying arguments against it."*

And again: "All fasting, for whatsoever end it be undertaken, must be done without any opinion of the necessity of the thing itself, without censuring others, with all humility, in order to the proper end, and just as a man takes physic, of which no man hath reason to be proud, and no man thinks it necessary, but because he is in sickness, or in danger and disposition to it." †

May the God of all grace and wisdom give His people a right judgment and understanding in this and in all things relating to their souls' health; and to His name be glory for ever. AMEN.

* "Holy Living," chap. iv. sec. v. 5. † *Ibid.* 9.

# XXIX.

## THE FLESH AND THE TREASURE.

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:
"But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:
"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.
"The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.
"But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!
"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.
"Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?
"Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?
"Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?
"And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:
"And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.
"Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?
"Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?
"(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.
"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.
"Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof."—MATT. vi. 19-34.

AVING completed His instruction on the subject of spiritual duties, our Lord, in the passage now before us, which cannot conveniently be divided, delivers some general precepts for our guidance in this world, and for the cor-

rection of various errors into which our carnal hearts too frequently betray us. These precepts relate to one general subject, namely, "The Flesh and the Treasure" —the things pertaining to bodily life and worldly property—all those SECULAR CONCERNS on which men usually bestow their chief care and labour, but which we are here taught to regard as of inferior importance to the things of eternity. A formal and detailed exposition of these verses will be unnecessary. They are familiar to professing Christians from childhood, and probably few are ignorant of the lessons they convey. All that shall now be attempted is to follow our Lord's train of reasoning, and affectionately to enforce the adoption of these precepts as our rule of life.

The course of thought pursued in the passage before us had its origin, most probably, in the "reward" so frequently mentioned in the preceding verses. The "hypocrites," against whom we are so strongly cautioned, do alms and pray and fast, that they may be seen of men, and obtain their praise. That is the only reward they desire, and that reward they have, and have nothing further to expect; but true worshippers are exhorted to seek for a higher reward, which shall be openly bestowed upon them by their Father, which seeth in secret. The reward of the hypocrite is limited to this world; and to have the desires fixed upon such a reward is a certain indication of a carnal and worldly heart, whose treasure is wholly in the earth, and which never rises above the desire of earthly gains or delights. All such treasure, our Lord now warns us, is in its nature perishable; and therefore He bids us lay up treasures in heaven, where no destructive agent can affect them, and no violence deprive us of them.

In addition to this reference to rewards which the

hypocrite and the true worshipper respectively set before them, our Lord appears to have designed to impart some instruction on that most difficult of all branches of knowledge—the knowledge of ourselves. The lesson is contained in the words, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (ver. 21). Whatever is the object of our supreme admiration and desire, that is our treasure, and upon that our heart's affection will assuredly be fixed, and that will be the object to which all our energies will be directed. Hence the importance of laying up our treasure, or finding the object of our chief affection in heaven. If our affection be set upon any earthly object, whether it be the applause of our fellow-men or riches or honours or carnal pleasures, we can derive no solid or permanent satisfaction from any of these. Our costly garments may be eaten by insects, our grain destroyed by rust or canker, our gold and silver carried off by thieves (Jam. v. 2, 3). Everything earthly is not only insecure, but transitory. How great, then, is the folly of those who know themselves to be dying men, going down step by step, day by day, into the ever-yawning grave, and who are nevertheless clutching eagerly at the delusive shadows of earth, which must soon be beyond their grasp, and continue wholly unmindful of the things which belong to their peace, which soon shall be for ever hid from their eyes.

Taking this general principle, that the supreme affections of the heart are always where the treasure is, as unquestionably sound, is it not passing strange that the great mass of mankind seem really not to know what their treasure is, or whether it is laid up in earth or in heaven? The instruction that follows (vers. 22, 23) seems intended to inculcate the necessity of having one chief aim or end before us, and of being sure that it is the right one. The light or lamp of the body is the

eye: it is by the eye that we are enabled to walk in a straight path; and if our eye be *single*, or steadfastly fixed on the right object, then our whole body is full of light, and we are left in no doubt or uncertainty as to our course. Now, as there is only one right object, which every man is commanded to set before him, he that looks or turns aside after other objects, and gives to them, or any of them, that attention and care which ought to be given to the object which alone is worthy, cannot be said to have "a single eye." He does not look straight before him; his eye is evil, and his whole man is full of darkness, for he has not the true light, and knows not the road he is pursuing. If a man's whole soul be thus darkened, he is like a blind man, wandering he knows not whither, groping vainly, and finding no light. How great, alas! how great is such darkness!

Yet such is, in sad truth, the condition of many thousands of the human race, and of not a few even of professors of religion. *They know not where they are, what they are doing, or whither they are going.* Even in worldly things, it is comparatively rare to meet a man who has a well-defined aim in life—who has "a single eye" steadfastly set upon the achievement of a particular object, which he pursues with unfailing pertinacity, neither deterred by dangers, hindered by difficulties, nor discouraged by delays. The very few among men who have thus had a chief end, to which every other aim in life has been subordinated, have made themselves a name thereby. These are they that have been distinguished by the title of "Great." To some men earthly dominion, and the extension of it by conquest, has been the one purpose of their lives, and following that end with all their hearts and understandings, they have attained it. Cyrus, Alexander, Cæsar, Napoleon, and other con-

querors have been severally called "The Great," just because they had one thing continually before them, and that one thing they sought after until they obtained it. Precisely in the same way there have been "great" poets, "great" orators, "great" statesmen, "great" philosophers. The gift of genius is not alone sufficient to make a man "great." The steadfast, undivided, undeviating pursuit of the one object is also necessary; but where genius and singleness of eye are combined, excellence and distinction are the invariable results.

It is one thing, however, to have a chief aim before us, and another to be assured that our aim is the right one. If it be otherwise, all the greatness we may achieve will not make us really happy. Those on whom the world has conferred the title of "Great" have rarely been happy, but have more frequently closed a life of turmoil and corroding care by a premature and miserable death. Alexander died at the age of thirty, the victim of intemperance acting upon an over-wrought brain. Cæsar was assassinated before he had organised the empire he had won. Napoleon perished a miserable exile on a rock of the ocean. And so of many others who, though they have found the object to the pursuit of which they had devoted all their energies, have found neither peace nor contentment therein. And the reason of this unhappy climax is simply that they were either pursuing objects in themselves unlawful, or making that their chief end which ought to have been secondary and subordinate. Genius is, indeed, a most precious and admirable gift; but if it be not directed aright, the light that is in its possessor is darkness, deep and dense. His eye is evil, and instead of being a lamp to guide him on his path, it becomes rather an "*ignis fatuus*," or a false beacon, to betray him to ruin.

The importance of choosing the right object at the

beginning of life cannot therefore be too highly estimated. It is impossible, says our Divine COUNSELLOR, to serve TWO masters: no man CAN have two *chief ends* set before him: it is, in the very nature of things, impossible that two *supremes* can co-exist. Probably there is no man capable of intelligent apprehension who will refuse assent to this self-evident truth. How, then, shall we account for the fact that the large majority of mankind are constantly engaged in attempting what they know and confess to be utterly impossible—striving, namely, to serve two masters, when they can only serve one.

The two masters of whom our Lord here speaks, as engaged in a sort of rivalry for the ascendency over man, while man vainly seeks to effect a compromise between their competing claims, are God and mammon. Mammon is an old Phenician word, signifying "riches," or wealth of any kind, and is used to denote "all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life"—everything, in short, that "is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John ii. 16). Now, let any man put the question plainly to himself—"Whether of these two masters am I serving?" or, in an equivalent form, "Is the chief end I have set before me an earthly or a heavenly one?" What would be his answer? Can he, in sincerity, and in the presence of the Searcher of hearts, say with the Psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee?" (Ps. lxxiii. 25.) Or can he say with Peter, "Lord, Thou knowest all things: Thou knowest that I love Thee?" (John xxi. 17.) No doubt, even if any man can make such a profession, he must qualify it by a confession of many failings and shortcomings and backslidings. But the question for a man to ask himself is not, "Am I absolutely without sin?"

for this no man will ever be able to answer affirmatively in this mortal body; but, "Is the love of God the constraining and controlling principle of my life? Is that love the spring of my actions, and the fountain of my highest joys?" Surely every professing Christian at least ought to be able to say thus much; and he who cannot say thus much has reason to fear that the light that is in him is still darkness, and that he has not yet crossed the boundary line which separates the service of the world from the service of God.

Unhappily, there are comparatively few that desire to be, in this exalted sense, the servants of God. Without speaking of the multitude that make no profession of religion at all, and do not even pretend to serve God, look at those who call themselves Christians, and are members of the Visible Church. Will not many such Christians be ready to say, "This paramount and exclusive service of God is not required: we must to a certain extent combine with it the service of mammon, or how shall we provide food and raiment for ourselves and families?" How is such a plea to be answered?

Sometimes, it is to be feared, men plead thus in a disingenuous spirit, well knowing that to provide things honest in the sight of all men for his family and household is a duty plainly enjoined upon every man, not only by the law of nature, but also by the Word of God (Rom. xii. 17; 1 Tim. v. 8; 2 Cor. viii. 21). To provide for our families "honestly," that is, becomingly, reputably, according to our station, is not serving mammon, unless, as is sometimes done, we make gods of our families, and under covert of providing for them and forwarding them in the world, neglect every religious duty, and exhibit selfishness in one of its most plausible, but, at the same time, in one of its most dangerous disguises. But lawful diligence in lawful business is the

ordinary way in which a Christian man is called to serve God in this life. The idea that the service of God consists only, or even chiefly, in reading the holy Scriptures, in prayer, and in attendance upon the ordinances of the sanctuary, with some measure of attention bestowed upon evangelistic and benevolent operations, is entirely without foundation in truth. Comparatively few Christians are able to devote their whole time to spiritual and charitable duties; but we are required to devote our whole time to the service of God: "HIM ONLY shalt thou serve," is the rigorous demand of His law. If, then, diligence in business, or the prosecution of our profession or calling in this world with fervency of spirit, were inconsistent with serving the Lord (Rom. xii. 11), the Apostle Paul must have laboured under a strange misconception, and our blessed Lord, in saying, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon," must have prescribed an impracticable rule of duty.

The truth is, that some of the leaven of the dark ages still lurks among our measures of meal. In those cimmerian centuries, "a life of religion" was believed to consist in withdrawing from the business as well as from the pleasures of the world, and spending one's time in devotional exercises, in maceration of the flesh, and sometimes in ministering to the poor and needy. They who lived this sort of life were called "religious persons;" the houses in which they consorted together were called "religious houses;" and devoting one's self to a living tomb in this fashion was called "entering religion." The exposure of the infamous abominations practised in these "religious houses" was one of the great causes which contributed to the Reformation; but the idea still survives, that religion is one thing, and secular business another thing, and that a man cannot be religious who is compelled to mingle with the world, and eat his

bread in the sweat of his face. An idea which implie so severe a reproach upon God and His law cannot be too speedily or too decidedly banished from our minds. It is true that the public worship of God is from the force of habit still frequently called "Divine service," and thus the notion is kept alive, that the service of God consists in the observance of devotional exercises. But these exercises are professions of a desire and a willingness to serve God, and preparations for His service, rather than service itself. They are most important and valuable as means of nourishing and refreshing the soul, as channels by which the believer receives grace and strength, direction and encouragement; but they are not actual service, any more than eating and drinking and going to school are the business of life.

To serve God is to love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind; and the evidence of this love which God requires is obedience to His commandments. God has placed us in the world, and has given each of us certain personal, relative, and social duties. We are therefore serving Him, and showing our love to Him, when we cheerfully accept the position which He assigns to us, and zealously fulfil the duties belonging to it. To do this, always with a lively remembrance of our own utter unworthiness and of the wonders of redeeming grace, is religion: this is to serve God, and to eschew the service of mammon. No mistake can be more pernicious than to imagine that religion and daily duty are inconsistent. They are, on the contrary, identical. Religion is duty, and duty is religion. All our duties are religious duties. It is not necessary to go out of the world to serve God: we are to serve Him *in* the world—in the field, or in the city; in the smoke, in the dust, and the din; with brain

and voice; with square and compass; with hammer and tongs.

What, then, it may be asked, is the difference between those two men, living in the same street, and working, it may be, side by side at the same bench? Both these two men are diligent in business: they both rise early and work faithfully; both are upright and punctual in their dealings; both have something to give, and willingly give it, to the poor and needy. If, then, religion, or the service of God, means nothing more than the faithful performance of one's duty in his station, why is it that one of these two men is known and esteemed as a religious man, and the other is not so esteemed? If we look below the surface, and inquire into the private life of these two men, we shall find that in the dwelling of the one the voice of prayer and praise is never heard, while from the other the melody of joy and health often greets the ear. The Sabbaths of the one are spent in idleness or visiting; of the other, in the courts of the Lord's house, or in teaching his children the way wherein they should go. The affection of the one is set on the things that are seen and temporal; of the other, on the things that are not seen and eternal. The two men are, in short, serving different masters; for though they may be doing precisely the same work, and with equal skill and industry, yet they are working from different motives, and have different ends before them. The one loves his wife and children, and labours for them, seeking to improve his own and their worldly condition, but beyond this he does not look: that man is serving mammon. The other man also loves his family, and works for them, seeking to improve his own and their worldly condition, but at the same time he looks higher. He does his work with good will, and with singleness of heart, as to the Lord, and not unto men; and he does

it for Christ's sake, feeling that this is what Christ, whom he has chosen for his Lord, has given him to do. This man is serving God (Col. iii. 23; Eph. vi. 5–8).

It is this necessity of providing for our temporal wants that forms the usual plea of those who are conscious that they are striving to combine the service of God with the service of mammon; and considering the imperious character of our physical wants, it is not surprising that men should at times feel some difficulty and doubt, and manifest an undue solicitude about the things pertaining to the flesh. To correct this feeling our Lord adds the caution, "Take no thought for your life," &c. (vers. 25–32). At the time the Bible was translated into English, the word "thought" was ordinarily used to express "anxiety," and to "take thought" meant "to be very anxious." The Greek word here used * means literally, "be not distracted," or divided, namely, in your minds. According to the more modern acceptation of the word "thought," our Lord's precept appears inconsistent with that common prudence and economy which are in other places of Scripture strongly commended. It is clearly every man's duty to provide for to-morrow; to lay up, as God may enable him, for a time of sickness, or for old age; and in certain cases to provide for the support and establishment of his family after his death. A man cannot do this without in some sort taking thought for the future. And our Lord's precept does not forbid this, but is rather directed against that over-anxiety about worldly things which, however veiled, is really tantamount to a forgetfulness of God's mercies hitherto, and a distrust of His providential care.

The argument in these verses is sublime from its very simplicity. God has given us living bodies; He has

* μεριμνᾶτε, *q.d.*, *μερίζετε τὸν νοῦν.*

given us life: are not these immeasurably greater gifts than food and raiment? If He has given us life as a direct gift (Gen. ii. 7; Acts xvii. 28), shall He not much more give us those things which are necessary to support life? If He feeds the fowls of the air, which sow not, reap not, and gather not into barns, are not we much better than they? What profit have we, after all, in these worldly anxieties with which so many imbitter their lives? With all our solicitude we cannot add one cubit to our stature, or prolong, by ever so small a period, the measure of our days! (Ps. xxxix. 5.) And again, with respect to raiment, consider the lilies of the field, which toil not, nor spin, and yet are arrayed with a loveliness and magnificence far surpassing that of Solomon in all his glory. If God be so lavish of His bounties to the flowers and grass of the field, which are seen to-day smiling in all their native loveliness, and to-morrow wither away, or are cast as fuel into the oven, shall He not then much more clothe us? Why then should we encourage this inordinate anxiety about our bodily wants? Our heavenly Father knoweth that we have need of food and raiment, and we may surely trust Him that we shall not want. The Gentiles, the nations that know not the true God, but serve dumb idols, seek after these things, regarding them as their chief end; but we, who have had the advantage of a Divine revelation, and have experienced the loving-kindness of our heavenly Father, ought to be above these grovelling thoughts, and cherish loftier sentiments and nobler aims.

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness;" for such is the only end worthy chief concern of a rational and immortal creature of God. Our Lord was a Jew, speaking to Jews, living under the Mosaic dispensation, and acknowledging the Divine authority

of the Law and the Prophets. To a well-instructed Jewish mind the phrase "kingdom of God" could mean nothing else than the reign of the Messiah foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures, as preparatory and introductory to the glory of heaven as promised to the children of the Covenant. And, accordingly, our Lord's words here, while they do not reveal the way in which alone a sinner of Adam's race may be made a partaker of that glory which is to come, are nevertheless such as to stimulate inquiry, self-examination, and prayer. A man earnestly seeking the kingdom of God as his chief end, and understanding that His kingdom is a kingdom of righteousness, and that perfect holiness must be the character of all that are admitted into that kingdom, will be led to ask himself, Have I any such righteousness or perfect holiness? Trying himself by the standard of God's law, he can arrive at no conclusion but that he is in himself unworthy to sit down in that abode of purity and peace; and if his inquiries were to cease here, he could only sink in darkness and despair. But if he is in earnest, he will not stop here. He will be led to ask, Why are we encouraged to seek the kingdom of God if the search be hopeless? And then the inquiry will arise, How shall man be just with God? How shall man, being a sinner by nature and practice, appear before God as perfectly righteous? This is substantially identical with the Gospel question, "What shall I do to be saved?"

To these inquiries the saints of the Old Testament saw the answer in the sacrifices and other rites of the Ceremonial Law, which pointed to the great redemption that should afterwards be accomplished by the Son of God. They saw the promised Saviour afar off, and were persuaded of Him, and embraced Him as all their salvation and all their desire. To us, living under the

Gospel, the full light has come, and the righteousness of God has been revealed in the perfect obedience of the man Christ Jesus, the benefits of which are proclaimed unto all men, and are actually conferred upon all who by grace believe in His name. To us Christians, then, there is no obscurity in our Lord's language : to us God no longer dwells in the thick darkness, but has manifested His glory—that glory which was His own chief end in creating the world, and the illustration of which consequently should be the chief end of His intelligent creatures—that glory which He has manifested in the face of His Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

This, then, is the climax of the argument against worldly solicitude. "The kingdom of God and His righteousness" includes everything else. If we seek THIS as our chief end, we have the solemn assurance of Him who spake as never man spake, who is Himself the embodiment of God's truth, and who knows and sympathizes with all human wants and infirmities, that "all these things," about which men disquiet themselves in vain, shall be added unto us. When God proposed a choice to Solomon, saying, "Ask what I shall give thee," the wise man asked not for earthly things, but for wisdom and understanding, a request which, in its highest sense, included the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and God gave him not only that which he sought first, but added also that which he had not asked, riches and honour, so that he exceeded all the kings of the earth. To those that hear His Word in the present day God in effect offers a similar choice. On the one hand, the kingdom of God and His righteousness; on the other, the world and the things of the world. To all the sons of men He cries by His Word and Spirit, "How long halt ye between two opinions?"

"Choose ye this day whom ye will serve!" (Josh. xxiv. 15; 1 Kings xviii. 21.)

"Take therefore," our Lord concludes, "no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof." The evils that each day bring with it are sufficient for that one day. Let us not yield to apprehensions of calamities that may never come; but while exercising all proper prudence, let us be content to live in daily dependence upon our heavenly Father, in the full assurance that the trials He sees fit to send He will give us strength to bear.

Sentiments resembling in sound the concluding sentiment of this chapter are often found in the mouths of worldly men, and even of the profligate and profane. "Let us enjoy ourselves to-day," cries the thoughtless reveller, "and let to-morrow take care of itself!" "Let us eat and drink," the old heathen used to say, "for to-morrow we die!" Many a week's wages has been spent in one night, and many a large estate has been dissipated in a few months, under the influence of these and similar carnal maxims. "The present moment is our own, the next we never saw," is the ungodly saying of a great poet, whose genius, high-reaching as it was, did sometimes unhappily wallow in the mire. These random words, thoughtlessly written, are as thoughtlessly re-echoed by thousands, who affect to relish them as a smart saying, though they are well aware of the falsehood of the sentiment. The present moment is NOT our own, but God's. To Him we are responsible for the right employment of every moment as it flies. Our times are in His hand; and if it be true that our days are swifter than a post, let it be our prayer that God may teach us so to number them that we may apply

our hearts unto wisdom (Job ix. 25; Ps. xc. 12). "The night," says the Apostle, "is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly (purely and uprightly), as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Rom. xiii. 12–14).

# XXX.

## JUDGING AND REPROVING.

"Judge not, that ye be not judged.
"For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.
"And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?
"Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?
"Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.
"Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you."—MATT. vii. 1-6.

ATTEMPTS have sometimes been made to reduce the Sermon on the Mount to a formal plan, or rather to prove that it was constructed on a formal plan, with heads, subdivisions, and particulars, like an orthodox discourse of the eighteenth century. Most of these attempts have been overstrained, and entirely unsuccessful. But, at the same time, it is not true, as some have supposed, that the Sermon on the Mount is a mere congeries of our Lord's sayings, without method or arrangement. There is an evident unity of design in the whole discourse, and a concealed method, which has been pointed out, as occasion required, in the preceding pages. The discourse is properly divided into four main parts: and on the

consideration of the fourth of these main parts we are now about to enter. (See page 3.)

This fourth part appears to be supplementary to the former three. We find seven separate subjects touched upon, and precepts delivered which either supply additional counsel on subjects previously handled, or are intended to give weight and completeness to the whole as a code of Christian ethics. This part of the Sermon may therefore be considered as consisting of seven sections, and the matters treated of are the following: *first*, Judging and reproving; *secondly*, Speciality and importunity in prayer; *thirdly*, The golden rule of duty; *fourthly*, The narrow way that leadeth to life, and the broad way that leadeth to destruction; *fifthly*, False prophets; *sixthly*, The difference between profession and practice; and *seventhly* and *lastly*, The difference between the mere hearers of Christ's sayings, and the doers of them.

Throughout the whole of this part will be observed a manifest design to prepare the minds of men for the acknowledgment of our Lord's Messiahship, and for the believing reception of the Gospel salvation.

The subject now before us is that of JUDGING AND REPROVING THE FAULTS OF OTHERS; and our Lord's precepts appear to be supplementary to those in the first part of the Sermon on the love of our neighbour (chap. v. 43-48). Our Lord had already taught that "our neighbour" is every human being, and is to be loved as ourselves, even though he be our enemy. The law of Moses, no doubt, forbade the Israelites to hold intercourse or to intermarry with the heathen nations, and excluded the Ammonite and the Moabite from the congregation of the LORD; but these were judicial sentences, and were not intended to encourage sentiments of personal animosity and vindictiveness. The maxim, "Thou

shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy," which, under the corrupt teaching of the scribes, had become current among the Jews as a genuine precept of the Divine law, was opposed to the whole spirit of that law. Our Lord, in effect, teaches that no differences of country, creed, or party should be permitted to interfere with that charity which every man owes to his fellow-man, even to enemies, persecutors, and slanderers; and that in our conduct to others we ought to imitate the ways of God our heavenly Father, who is kind even to the unthankful and the evil.

In the passage now before us our Lord adds to His former teaching the following precepts :—

I. That the love of our neighbour includes not only kind and benevolent actions towards him, but also charitable judgment of his conduct and motives, and forbids the contrary.

II. That in reproving our brother's faults, we must be careful that we ourselves are not chargeable with the same, or even greater faults.

III. That, on the other hand, we must not administer reproof to profane and impure persons, who would not be benefited, but hardened thereby; and generally, that so far as in us lieth, we must preserve holy things from profanation.

"Judge not," saith our Divine COUNSELLOR, "that ye be not judged." It is unnecessary to say that our Lord's precept has no reference to those who are judges by office in causes tried according to law, civil or ecclesiastical. The whole Word of God, and especially the precepts and example of Christ and His Apostles, enjoin reverence for the judgment-seat, and obedience to constituted authority, even when the individual temporarily occupying the post or exercising the authority may not

be personally worthy of either reverence or obedience. So far from those being forbidden to judge who are lawfully called to do so in duly established courts of Church or State, we are plainly instructed that rulers, or the judges that represent them, are ministers of God to us for good, as being sent for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well (Rom. xiii. 4; 1 Pet. ii. 14).

Neither can this precept be intended to prohibit private Christians from acting as arbitrators, when duly required so to do by the mutual choice of two or more brethren who may be at variance, but who may desire an amicable adjustment of their differences. The settlement of disputes by arbitration is expressly recommended by S. Paul, though his remarks must be understood as applying more particularly to the state of things existing in his day, when the only civil courts to which Christians could bring their causes were presided over by heathen judges; and when the spectacle of Christian brethren, whom their religion taught specially to love one another, contending with mutual bitterness about worldly things, and that before unbelievers, who were glad of any excuse for their unbelief, was calculated to bring, and did actually bring, reproach upon the Gospel. To the Christians at Corinth, a city celebrated not more for its wealth and magnificence than for its revolting impurities thinly veiled under the worship of Aphrodité, the Apostle writes, "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy (that is, unfit, incompetent) to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?" (1 Cor. vi. 1–3.) His exhortation is, that, as a rule, Christians should refrain from

litigation, and rather refer their disputes, if any arise that cannot be privately settled, to the arbitration of brethren. And though the objection which existed in those days in heathen lands against the ordinary tribunals, strengthened as it was by the notorious venality of the judges, does not exist in the same force against the courts established under Christian laws, in which justice is purely administered, yet the principle holds good that arbitration is to be preferred generally to process of law, and that Christians may lawfully act as arbitrators.

And still further, our Lord does not prohibit us from forming any judgment whatever upon the conduct of other men, in any circumstances. In other parts of the Word of God we are expressly commanded to form such judgments, and it is, indeed, absolutely necessary for us to do so. If any man that is called a brother be of impure life, or a covetous man, or a railer, we may not even eat with him. "Do not ye judge them that are within? . . . Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Cor. v. 12, 13; see also Phil. iii. 17; Eph. v. 6–13; 2 Thess. iii. 6–15, &c.) From these and similar passages it is evident that there are circumstances in which it is not only lawful for us to form some judgment respecting our brethren and others, but also to act upon that judgment.

In a word, we may be quite sure that our Lord intended to forbid nothing which is elsewhere enjoined in the holy Scriptures. His precept appears rather to be directed against that spirit of censoriousness—that tendency to form, and to utter, rash and uncharitable judgments concerning our brethren and neighbours—which is far too prevalent even among professing Christians. It can scarcely be a matter for surprise, if men and women, avowedly living according to the course of

this world, pursuing the things of this life as their chief end, and having no joys and no aspirations beyond this passing scene, find a morbid and malignant satisfaction in discovering flaws in the character of those who make more pretension than themselves to spirituality of mind. But the humiliating truth, which candour will not permit us to conceal, is, that the children of this world are not at all more prone to this vice of censoriousness than many of those who profess to be children of light. Strife and envying are natural to fallen man, and from natural men we can look only for natural results; but from the disciples of Christ we look for some indications of the mind that was also in Christ, and some effort at least to walk as He also walked. Truth and faithfulness, however, compel the admission that a very large number of professing Christians appear wholly oblivious of our Lord's precept, and spend a large proportion of their time in judging one another: in taking up, if not actually inventing, evil reports against their brethren and neighbours; in going up and down as tale-bearers, and thus virtually scattering firebrands, arrows, and death wherever they go (Prov. xxvi. 18–20). And what makes these social pests ten times more odious is, that they frequently exercise their self-constituted censorship under pretext of religious zeal. Anxiety for the correction of errors, and for the reclamation of the erring brother or sister, is the usual excuse offered, not by mere nominal Christians only, but even by those professing godliness, for circulating the most malignant whispers and insinuations against those with whom probably, though with singular inconsistency, they are outwardly on friendly terms. Every now and then, as may be expected when such volcanic ingredients are seething in the social caldron, an explosion takes place: the slanderers quarrel among themselves, each

is forward to publish what the other has said of this brother or that, and thus the monstrous calumnies which are circulated by the under-currents of society are forced to the surface and revealed in their hideous proportions. If Christian men and women are found soiling their lips and hands with the "tongue of wolf" and "root of hemlock" which belong to "secret, black, and midnight hags," the proper authors of nameless deeds, is it to be wondered that the enemies of the LORD take occasion to blaspheme; and that men of the world find an apology for their unbelief and hardness of heart in the inconsistency and moral cowardice of those who, while professing to belong to Christ, are the enemies of His cross?

For the correction of any tendency which we may detect in ourselves towards this vice of censoriousness, our Lord bids us remember that as we judge others, so will others judge us. It is a very salutary truth, if the whisperers and backbiters that infest every community could only be brought to feel it, that they who pronounce rash and uncharitable judgments against others, provoke similar judgments against themselves. Those whose tongues are ever ready in the service of detraction, so far from making themselves popular, are the objects of universal contempt and avoidance, even among those who sometimes encourage them by listening to their evil reports. The judgment wherewith they have judged is pronounced in turn against themselves, and the measure which they have meted out to others is measured to them again, and that with usury.

This, however, is the lowest view of our Lord's corrective suggestion, which, though it has immediate reference to the judgment of men, has regard ultimately also to the judgment of God. Uncharitable judgment of our brethren and neighbours is the offspring of secret envy and malice, and cannot but be hateful in the sight

of a holy and heart-searching God. We are taught that if we do not freely forgive our debtors, or those who have actually trespassed against us, or injured us, in person or estate, our heavenly Father will not forgive us the debts we all owe to Him, and which we are utterly unable to pay. How much more, then, if we backbite with our tongue, or take up a reproach against our neighbour, who has given us no cause of offence at all, except perhaps that he is more highly gifted, more successful, or more popular than ourselves—how much more, in such a case, may we expect that God will mete out the like measure to us! Let those who have at any time been disposed to judge others, refusing that favourable and generous construction which men who are exposed to temptation and compassed with infirmity have a right to expect one from another, remember that, even if they escape that social ostracism which is not unfrequently the punishment of the censorious in this world, they cannot escape the judgment of Him "unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid:" let them remember that "the Judge standeth before the door" (Jam. v. 9); and that "he shall have judgment without mercy that hath showed no mercy" (Jam. ii. 13). Even if our brother deserve censure, it is not our business, as private individuals, to pronounce that censure, still less to blazon his errors to the world. "There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?" (Jam. iv. 12). Rather let mercy rejoice against judgment (ii. 13): let us believe the best, and hope the best, even when stern justice calls for condemnation.

Let us now proceed to consider our Lord's instructions concerning REPROVING.

There are undoubtedly cases in which it is a Christian

man's duty to administer reproof. It was a precept of the law of Moses, "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him" (Lev. xix. 17); or, as the margin reads, "That thou bear not sin for him." If we see our neighbour sin, it is our duty to administer reproof in a manner becoming our relative positions; not officiously, or insolently, or angrily; but with discretion, and in a spirit of meekness and love. There is a limitation to this duty, which will have to be considered, and which arises out of the character of the person *meriting* reproof; what is more immediately before us concerns the character of those who undertake to *give* reproof. Our Lord's injunction is, that while reproving a brother's fault, we must be careful that we ourselves are not chargeable with the same or greater faults.

There are in almost all communities persons who have attained an unenviable notoriety for their ingenuity in fault-finding, and for their zealous endeavours to prove every one but themselves in the wrong. Every one who has had any experience in the business of deliberative assemblies, from small committees up to parliaments and ecclesiastical judicatories, must know, to his sorrow, that there is a class of men who make it their special "mission" to detect faults in the proceedings of others, but who seldom or never have any effectual amendment to propose, and are still less prepared with any definite proposal of their own. The annoyance, the exasperation, the delay, the sacrifice of important interests, caused by such men, is inconceivable by those who have not actually suffered from their powers of mischief. And the infliction becomes all the more oppressive and vexatious from the circumstance that these pragmatical obstructionists are usually men not entitled, either by their position or their abilities, to take a distinguished share in the direction of affairs, but ignorant pretenders, who have probably

been more than once themselves the subjects of severe animadversion, and who have elbowed themselves into the front rank by shear effrontery and clamour. It is unnecessary to say that reference is here intended not to any particular individuals, but to a class of men, unhappily too common everywhere, and of which representatives are to be found even in private life. Every day we meet persons ready to volunteer their services in extracting a microscopic splinter from the finger, or an infinitesimal atom of dust from the eye of a neighbour, or, such is their philanthropy, even from that of a perfect stranger; being all the while utterly oblivious of the beam that is so conspicuous in their own eye. So long as these meddling busy-bodies confine their attention to splinters and other small chaff * floating in this world's atmosphere, they may be put aside with a good-humoured smile, or a quiet admonition to look to their own affairs. But sometimes this offensive disposition exhibits itself in circumstances which call for more drastic treatment. The "hypocrites" to whom our Lord refers saw a mote in the eye of any one that transgressed the smallest fragment of their pretended traditions, while they themselves were spiritually blind. They saw a splinter in the hands of the disciples when they plucked the ears of wheat on the Sabbath-day, while their own hands were full of extortion and excess. Nothing less than a stern rebuke is suited to inconsistency so gross, to impudence so unblushing. Common sense, as well as common honesty, proclaims that he who teaches others must first teach himself (Rom. ii. 21, 23); and that the censor who condemns the errors of his brethren must see that his own hands are clean.

The qualification, then, which our Lord insists on in

* Κάρφος, any small dry thing, a grain of chaff or stubble, atom of dust, splinter, mote, &c.

those who administer reproof to others, is that they shall first cast the beam out of their own eye, so that they may see clearly to take the mote from their brother's eye. If our vision be thus clear, then it is a Christian duty to reprove sin, wherever we may see it, without fear or favour, lest we become partakers of other men's sins; but the Apostle, in exhorting Timothy to avoid such partnership in evil, immediately adds, as an essential caution, "Keep thyself pure" (1 Tim. v. 22). And from a consciousness of many imperfections, believers are frequently guilty of unfaithfulness to Christ and to the souls of men, while others are similarly unfaithful from lack of moral courage. Against these snares we have need to watch and pray. The Christian who accustoms himself to sit silently when God's name is taken in vain, or His holy Sabbath desecrated; when conversation overpassess the bounds of cheerfulness and good-humour, and becomes profane, slanderous, or impure; or when any of God's laws are dishonoured and defied, and does not, in some way or other, protest against the wrong, without doubt makes himself an accomplice in the guilt. At the same time, it must be remembered that the beneficial effect of a reproof depends very much on the manner and spirit in which it is given. As a general rule, it should be private, and so administered as to convince the person reproved that we speak solely out of regard for God's law and his own welfare. But too frequently this is altogether neglected: the reprover speaks as if the offence had been committed against himself; and the angry vindictive tone which he assumes only defeats the end he has in view. Then, again, we have often no other means of reproving sin with any hope of good effect than by quietly withdrawing from the society of those who offend. And, in truth, if our walk and conversation be such as becomes God-fearing

men and servants of Christ, our very presence will have a restraining effect, our withdrawal will be felt as a rebuke, and God will not suffer our words spoken for His cause to fall to the ground.

To His instruction on reproving, our Lord adds a very necessary limitation, in which will be found enunciated a general principle, capable of extended application. "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again, and rend you."

Dogs were animals ceremonially unclean, and held by the Jews in extreme contempt. In their cities, as throughout the East to the present day, dogs were permitted to run about the streets, having no owners, and feeding on whatever offal they could pick up or seize. To compare a person to a dog was to cast the most offensive reproach and indignity upon him; as when Abishai said of Shimei, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king?" (2 Sam. xvi. 9). Hence, throughout Scripture, dogs are the symbols of insincere, impudent, impure, greedy professors of religion. "Beware of dogs," saith the Apostle (Phil. iii. 2); and in the enumeration of those who are excluded from the New Jerusalem we find "dogs" classed with "sorcerers, whoremongers, murderers, idolaters, and whatsoever loveth and maketh a lie" (Rev. xxii. 15). So backsliders, relapsing into the sins they have once abjured, are compared, both by Solomon and S. Peter, to "dogs returning to their vomit" (Prov. xxvi. 11; 2 Pet. ii. 21), in allusion to a well-known habit of the dog, which, disgusting as it is, becomes all the more instructive on that very account. There is therefore no difficulty in understanding what class of persons our Lord intended

when He said, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs."

"Swine," in like manner, were unclean animals, prohibited by the Levitical law either for food or sacrifice, and held accordingly in the greatest abomination by the Jews generally. Yet we find it mentioned as a proof of the spiritual declension of the people in the days of Isaiah, that they ate swine's flesh, and that broth of abominable things was in their vessels (Isa. lxv. 4; lxvi. 17); and so corrupt were their lives, and so hypocritical their worship, that their sacrifices were no better in God's sight than actual murders, or the offering of unclean animals: "He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood" (lxvi. 3). We may understand, therefore, that the "swine" was an emblem of everything unclean or abominable, morally or spiritually. No circumstance could more forcibly illustrate to a Jewish mind the degradation resulting from a life of debauchery, than that of the "prodigal" reduced to the position of a swineherd, and being fain to fill his belly with husks* that the swine did eat (Luke xv. 16). And nothing could more forcibly illustrate the superabounding grace of God, as contrasted with the selfish exclusiveness of man, than the crowning incident of that marvellous parable. The Pharisaical "elder brother" refused to welcome, or even to recognize, his erring brother that had repented; a swineherd was no fit associate for this "righteous over-

* τῶν κεράτων = pods or husks; supposed to refer chiefly to the pods of the "Kharûb" (*ceratonia siliqua*, Linn.), the long slender pods of which have a sweetish taste, and are eaten by the poorer classes in Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, to this day, besides being commonly used for fattening swine. These are the *locust* beans, on which some have thought John the Baptist fed. (See an interesting passage in Dr Thomson's "Land and the Book," p. 665; also Dean Stanley's "Sinai and Palestine," p. 146.)

much" gentleman; but the tender father, who had the greatest cause to be offended, received his penitent son with open arms, notwithstanding the depth to which he had fallen, and killed for him the fatted calf.

If, then, there are men so hardened in covetousness, profligacy, or ungodliness, that they can be compared only to "dogs" or "swine," our Lord seems to intimate that reproof administered to such would be worse than wasted. Not that they are beyond the reach of Divine grace; but that they have been sitting so long in the seat of the scorner that godly counsel and rebuke would only harden them more, and rouse them to fresh acts of profanity, perhaps of violence. So Solomon saith, "He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame; and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot. Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee" (Prov. ix. 7, 8). Such is the force of our Lord's precept. We are taught that, while it is our duty to reprove our erring brethren, and not to bear sin for them, but earnestly and lovingly to promote their restoration and amendment, we ought not to act without due caution and consideration. We may not unseasonably offer holy precepts or the Gospel "pearl of great price" to obstinate and reckless men, who would only be exasperated, and turn in a rage upon their well-meaning but indiscreet advisers.

The precept now before us, however, though it has a direct application to the subject of reproving, is of a general character, and implies that in all cases, so far as in us lieth, we must endeavour to preserve holy things from profanation by the obstinately unbelieving and impenitent, or by persons of unholy and scandalous life. There is a limit, for example, beyond which we may not persist even in preaching the Gospel of salvation. If the inhabitants of a city refused to receive the ambas-

sadors of Christ, His own commandment was, that they should shake off the dust from their feet as a testimony against them. And again, He said, "When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another" (Matt. x. 23). Acting on this injunction, the Apostles, when they found the Jews, to whom they always first addressed themselves in every city to which they came, contradicting and blaspheming, and thus proclaiming themselves unworthy of eternal life, turned to the Gentiles (Acts xiii. 44–46). And so, when it is found that preaching the Gospel only makes men more and more hardened—when they trample under foot the Son of God, and count the blood of the Covenant an unholy thing—are not such men rightly characterized as "dogs" and "swine," since they put contempt upon all that is sacred and venerable, and cannot distinguish between pearls and pebbles? From such men, concerning whom it is foretold that they shall abound in the latter days of the Church's history, Christian ministers are exhorted to turn away (2 Tim. iii. 1–5). In these terrible verses the Apostle specifies characters, which have never been more obstrusively conspicuous in the Visible Church than they are in this latter half of the nineteenth century—this very age of progress in which we live.

But to conclude. This precept gives warrant to the office-bearers of the Church, to whom Christ hath intrusted the keys of government and discipline, for excluding from holy ordinances the ignorant and scandalous. The man who has the means of instruction within his reach, and yet continues ignorant; or who, having been instructed, and received into the fellowship of Christ's people, nevertheless lives in sin and neglect of his responsibilities,—such a man is less excusable than the heathen, who have had neither light nor opportunity. What better is that perverse and rebellious man than the un-

clean animal, which, however carefully cleansed, returns to its wallowing in the mire!

The amount of crass ignorance existing on the subject of Christian ordinances is such as occasionally fills ministers of Christ with astonishment. The practice of promiscuous administration of the Sacraments, too common even in Churches which profess to make some restrictions, has led to grievous profanation. It is a question worthy of serious consideration, whether, in permitting parents to take upon themselves, in the face of the Church, the most solemn obligations with respect to the religious training of their children, while they are themselves neither in communion with the Church, nor desirous of being admitted thereto, there is not a specific violation of the precept before us. Let us hope that the time is not far distant when the legitimate discipline of the Church shall be exercised with more vigour, and her believing members, being daily strengthened by living intercourse with their risen Head, shall grow together in holiness and love, even unto life eternal!

## XXXI.

## IMPORTUNITY AND SPECIALITY IN PRAYER.

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:
"For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.
"Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?
"Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?
"If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?"—MATT. vii. 7–11.

THE precepts contained in these verses may be regarded as supplementary to the instruction which our Lord had already given concerning prayer (chap. vi. 5–15). In considering that portion of the Sermon on the Mount, it was found necessary to treat somewhat fully of the whole subject of Prayer, and to touch upon some topics not immediately suggested by our Lord's words. It appeared essential to direct attention to the conditions of effectual prayer —namely, faith towards God, and forgiveness towards men; and also to the hindrances which too frequently cause our prayers to be ineffectual. And thus it was almost impossible to avoid anticipating some remarks which might perhaps have been more appositely offered in connexion with the passage now before us, in which we find our Lord's counsel concerning importunity and

speciality in prayer. These topics, though mentioned in former pages, have by no means been exhausted, but were of purpose passed over cursorily, their fuller consideration being reserved for the present opportunity.

The precepts before us have respect, we may reasonably suppose, to the circumstances of Christians living in this world of trial and difficulty. Many duties are enjoined upon us: many sufferings are appointed for us: many discouragements, clogs, and stumbling-blocks cause our hands to hang down and our knees to be feeble; and we cannot of ourselves either do or suffer as we ought. We have need of courage, strength, and fortitude greater than our own; and these we must seek and obtain by constant prayer. It is not difficult to imagine that some of those who had been listening to this discourse of Jesus might have been saying in their hearts, or even whispering one to another, "These are hard sayings! Where is the man that can hope to attain to such a standard of perfection as this? How is it possible to suppress all vindictive or impure *thoughts*, even if we refrain from overt acts? How is it possible for a man to love his enemy? How are we to maintain that simple, sincere, unostentatious spirit in which we are directed to do alms, to pray, and to fast? Or how can any man so far control his heart as to have no anxiety for the morrow?" Such questionings as these naturally arise in our hearts when we meditate on the exceeding breadth and purity of the Divine law as expounded by our blessed COUNSELLOR, and contrast it with the corrupt traditions which have been current among men. And many, while they have thus meditated, have been tempted to draw back from their Christian profession in utter despondency, feeling that if such a measure of spiritual attainment was essential to the maturity of the Christian character, it was hope-

lessly beyond their reach. It cannot be denied that such feelings are natural; but assuredly they are not gracious; and they indicate a very low degree of Christian knowledge and experience of the work of grace in the heart. A child cannot run so far, or climb so high, or lift so heavy a weight, as a full-grown man; nor can a full-grown man with his naked hands accomplish tasks which become perfectly easy with the help of machinery. A man who has a large log to split into slabs does not sit down and wring his hands in despair, because with his unaided strength he can make no impression upon it: he most justly despises such conduct as childish in the extreme; he does what is more to the purpose—goes to the blacksmith, and arms himself with a mall and wedges. Now, in our course through life, we find many a hard tough log to split; and if we attempt it with bare hands, we only weary ourselves to no purpose. We must apply mechanical power; and the mechanical power by which spiritual difficulties are overcome is Prayer.

Such is the lesson which our Lord here inculcates. His words are to be regarded as His answer to the thoughts of doubt and discouragement that might have arisen, and which He propably knew had arisen, in the minds of His hearers. He tells them, in effect, that they cannot do these things of themselves, for of himself no man is able to think one good thought, or to speak one good word, or to do one good work; but "ASK, and ye shall receive; SEEK, and ye shall find; KNOCK, and it shall be opened unto you."

Now, observe the comprehensiveness of this language. Superficial minds are apt to dismiss the subject by saying, "This of course is a figure of speech: it can never be meant that whatever we ask of God we shall receive." It is indeed true, that this promise must not be inter-

preted so as to contradict other parts of God's Word. Detached texts may be found to prove almost anything, and even things wholly irreconcilable with each other. Nevertheless, our Lord's language here is not a figure of speech. He speaks the words of truth and soberness; and His promise may be accepted by the believer in its express terms, with such limitations only as He Himself has taught us to make, and which are rendered necessary by the very nature of the case. It can scarcely be necessary formally to remind those who have any acquaintance with God's truth, and who acknowledge the authority of His Word, that prayer can be successful only when we ask for things agreeable to His character and consistent with His will, as these are exhibited in His law or in the leadings of His providence. Our Lord Himself indicates this limitation in this very passage. Our heavenly Father, He tells us, will give, not absolutely everything, but "good things," to them that ask Him. In the parallel passage of S. Luke's Gospel (xi. 13), our Lord says: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give *the Holy Spirit* to them that ask Him?" The meaning in both passages is substantially the same. The gift of the Holy Ghost includes every other gift. If we ask for that gift in sincerity, we shall receive it, and shall then be taught in all respects to pray aright. Thus we shall learn to ask for things that shall please God, and it will be found simply true, without any figure of speech, that "whatsoever we ask in prayer, believing, we shall receive." Under the guidance of the Spirit of truth we shall ask "good things," in an acceptable manner, and in an acceptable time. Almost all the misapprehension that prevails on the subject of prayer has arisen from not giving heed to these things; and as the subject is of

vital importance, it will be proper to illustrate it a little.

What, then, are we to understand by asking for good things, in an acceptable manner, and in an acceptable time?

We do not ask for "good things," when we ask only for things which are to minister to our own personal pride, pleasure, or aggrandizement. If we ask anything of God, only that we may have the means of pampering our own lusts, we ask amiss, and instead of marvelling or murmuring that we receive not, we should rather be thankful that God withholds from us what He knows would be injurious to our souls.

That man is not asking for "good things" who asks for the pardon of his sins, when he in truth only desires to escape the punishment of his sins, and has no hatred of them, nor desire to forsake them. God nowhere encourages us to hope for pardon apart from true repentance, which includes both godly sorrow for sin, and resolute turning to the LORD. Yet how frequently do men pray for mercy, confessing themselves, in words, to be guilty and miserable sinners, without any serious repentance, or any resolution to lead a new life! To pray thus is only to mock God.

If a man seek for the salvation of his soul, he seeks a "good thing;" but not so, if he seeks for salvation otherwise than as God has appointed. There is but one name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved (Acts iv. 12). To seek salvation on the ground of any merits of our own; on the ground of any mere carnal sorrow or remorse, miscalled repentance (2 Cor. vii. 9–11); on the ground of any outward reformation, or of any works, penances, sacrifices, or services of will-worship, is a virtual rejection of the Gospel, and a refusal to submit to the righteousness of God (Rom. x. 3). They

that seek thus shall not find (Hosea v. 6; Mic. iii. 4). Salvation, without the change of heart which God requires, if such a thing were conceivable, would not be a "good thing." The kingdom of heaven is the abode of happiness, joy, and peace, because it is the abode of holiness; an unsanctified heart would not be happy there; and there can be no sanctification to that soul which has not been washed in the blood of Christ, and clothed with the white raiment of His righteousness.

By "good things," in a word, must be understood, not merely what we in the vanity of our ignorance imagine to be good, but those which are really good, and which God Himself has set before us as things really to be desired (Isa. lv. 1, 2).

"Good things," moreover, must be asked in an acceptable mannner. In *humility;* not in a proud, self-righteous spirit, as if we deserved something of God. This is not asking, but demanding. We must come as beggars, naked and needy, having nothing, and having need of all things; bringing our empty vessels, and desiring that they may be filled out of God's fulness. In *sincerity;* not with feigned lips, as they do who ask that the power of sin may be subdued within them, while, nevertheless, there is some secret bosom sin which they are not minded to forsake. In *faith;* not wavering, or doubting; for without faith it is impossible that we can please God, or be acceptable worshippers (Heb. xi. 6). It is vain to ask, if we cannot ask with our whole heart; and this we cannot do if we are not sure that the thing we ask is agreeable to God's will.

Above all, if we would pray in an acceptable manner, we must pray in the name of Christ. Not merely that our prayers must be closed with the ordinary formula, "For Christ's sake," or "Through Jesus Christ our Lord." These and similar phrases are frequently used,

there is reason to fear, without any serious apprehension of their force and significance. To pray truly in the name of Christ implies a deep inward conviction of our personal need of the Saviour, and our reliance upon Him as our only hope of acceptance. Do not many utter the language or assume the posture of prayer without sufficiently reflecting that sinful flesh can have no direct communion with the holy God, and that no man has access to the Father but by the Son? (John xiv. 6.) Doctrinally, no doubt, professing Christians acknowledge Jesus as the only Mediator; but do they feel the necessity of His mediatorship in their hearts? Do they lay hold of it as a living reality in their approaches to the throne of grace? Do they feel that they cannot enter into the holiest but by that new and living way which He hath consecrated for His people? Unless we ask of God with some assurance that our prayers will be presented before the mercy-seat by Jesus as the Mediator of the New Covenant, and sprinkled with His blood, we do not ask acceptably, and therefore must ask in vain (Heb. x. 19–22).

Finally: "good things" must be asked in an acceptable time. Not merely when we are under the influence of *terror*. A man may be suddenly brought face to face with death, and a prayer is extorted from lips which have long been unused to prayer. But prayers wrung from fear are not heard: at least, while we attempt not to set limits to the Holy One of Israel, we have no warrant for expecting that God will hear such prayers. Many pray thus when His hand is heavy upon them; but when the affliction is removed, their fears subside, they forget their necessity, and cease to pray. Many prayers ascend from day to day which are no better than the cries of a slave, or a disobedient child, receiving well-merited stripes. He who prays

only under the pressure of alarm cannot pray acceptably, and does not ask for good things. Such prayer is not heard; ought not to be heard. God will have us come, not as slaves, but as sons; for He is not a taskmaster, but a Father, who bids His children come to Him in the spirit of adoption (Gal. iv. 6). The prayer that issues from a terrified but impenitent heart is not acceptable to God (Prov. i. 28). It is the broken and contrite spirit in which He delighteth (Ps. li. 17). The man who trembles at His word, and prays in the faith and hope of the Gospel, prays always in an acceptable time.

"NOW is the accepted time," saith the Apostle; "behold, NOW is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. vi. 2). If, then, we would ask in an acceptable time, we must ask *now*. If we delay asking till to-morrow, the promise is not for us. He that waits till to-morrow may find his lamp gone out, his day of grace passed away, the door of mercy shut—shut for ever. Then, though he should seek to enter in, he shall not be able (Luke xiii. 24). Though he should seek admission carefully with tears, the stern, inexorable answer will be, "I know thee not" (Matt. xxv. 12; Heb. xii. 17).

Such are the limitations which our Lord Himself teaches us to make in the interpretation of the promises now under consideration. These promises can be claimed by those alone who ask "good things," in an acceptable manner, and in an acceptable time. Thus understood, the promises may be regarded as absolute. Prayer, such prayer as God enjoins, is never offered in vain: the sighing of a contrite heart God never despises. The earnest, importunate prayer of the humble, penitent believer, approaching the mercy-seat in the name of Jesus, hungering and thirsting after righteousness,

and groaning under a sense of personal unworthiness, is always answered.

*Always answered.* These words are used advisedly, and with the full knowledge that many prayers are apparently *not* answered—certainly not by the giving of the thing specially asked for. Such every believer knows to be frequently the case; yet, notwithstanding this, our Lord's word is true, and true prayer is ALWAYS ANSWERED. "For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

But how, then, do we expect our prayers to be answered?

Are we, in our short-sighted wisdom, to dictate terms to the sovereign God, and prescribe to Him the form and manner in which He shall execute His own purposes? Are we always and altogether sure that what we ask would be really beneficial to us? Are we sure that it would not bring a curse, instead of a blessing? God loves His children too well to give them what they ask in their blindness and ignorance. But in thus withholding He does not violate His promise. He promises to give us *the desire of our heart.* When we pray, we have some ultimate end in view; and the thing we specifically ask for is, not the ultimate end, but something which we believe will accomplish that end. But God, who sees the end as well as the beginning, frequently knows that what we ask for will not give us what we really desire; and therefore He withholds the specific request, and gives us something else which He knows will help us to attain the desire of our hearts.

Sometimes God administers a signal rebuke to our want of faith, by giving us specifically in manner and form the very thing we ask for. A mother once sat watching by the sick-bed of her only son. A pious

minister came to pray with her, and found her distracted with fears lest her beloved son should be taken from her: her very life seemed bound up in the lad's life. The minister prayed earnestly: "Lord, if it be Thy will, look in pity upon this poor widow, and spare the life of her only son!" But the mother cried out, "No! no! it must be His will! My boy must not die!" The minister concluded his prayer, and with great solemnity and tenderness rebuked the mother, vainly endeavouring to bring her to a more submissive state of mind: "If my child is taken away," she cried, "what good shall my life do me?" And now, mark what followed. The mother's rebellious prayer was heard. Her son recovered, and grew to man's estate; but he proved disobedient and rebellious, a glutton and a drunkard; and, after a long course of riotous living, brought his mother's grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. "Better, oh, far better," was her penitent remark to the minister, from whose rebuke she had formerly turned away,—"better mourn for ten dead sons than for one living one!"

Another mother—and these examples are taken from among mothers, for of all the prayers that ascend to the throne of God, surely none are more fervent and sincere than those of a mother for her children—another mother, who had a small farm in a secluded parish in Scotland, prayed earnestly that she might live to see her son a minister of the Gospel. The boy was slightly deformed, and had a weak voice; but he grew up in wisdom and grace, passed through his course of study with credit, and came to his Presbytery with the most favourable testimonials. On account of his physical imperfections, however, the Presbytery did not feel justified in encouraging him to apply for licence, but advised him to devote himself to the occupation of teaching, and pro-

mised to use their influence in obtaining a suitable appointment for him. The poor mother was deeply distressed at this issue, and thought that her prayers had been in vain. The son, though not without some feeling of disappointment, had more wisdom than to reproach God, and more faith than to suffer himself to despond. He became a parish schoolmaster; and God strengthened him, and he grew in favour both with God and with men. In a few years his school became remarkable for the thorough education imparted therein, and, above all, for the strong religious principle which pervaded the whole system, and which the scholars carried into after-life. No less than seven of these scholars entered the holy ministry, and became zealous servants of Christ, turning many to righteousness, and shining as lights in the world. The mother lived to see it, and then she knew the end of the LORD. Then she knew that her prayer had been answered, and that God had given her more than she had asked. He had shut out her son from a profession in which he could have had little comfort, and could never have done efficient service; but He had given him eminence and success in another profession, wherein he had been blessed and made a blessing, and whereby his mother's prayer had been made to return sevenfold into her own bosom.

We may be assured, therefore, that the prayer of faith is always answered. If God at any time does not specifically grant the thing asked for, it is because He knows it would not really fulfil the desire of the worshipper, and because He purposes, in His own good time and way, to accomplish our desire by means far better than any that we in our ignorance can imagine. He always exceeds our prayers: He never disappoints or comes short of them. He does not mock the prayers of His people. If they ask for bread, or fish, or an egg

(Luke xi. 12), He either gives them specifically what they ask, or something better. He does not mock them by offering a stone, or a serpent, or a scorpion. If He do not see fit to answer the prayer in the specific terms of it, or if He delay for a season, it is that the faith and patience of the believing suppliant may be exercised and strengthened, and that in due time He may give him larger and richer gifts.

With all this, however, we may safely believe that our Lord, in the passage before us, and in others of a parallel character, did design to encourage speciality in prayer. Both God's Word and all Christian experience have shown, that if the thing specifically asked for be really a "good thing," and really for our benefit,—as to which we must trust God's wisdom rather than our own, —we have grounds for expecting that God will grant our request, even when it relates only to the things of this life. We may not be warranted, indeed, in pressing such requests to importunity. Our affections ought not to be set upon the things of the world; and instead of importunately craving for them, we should rather fear est God in His wrath should grant our rebellious desires, and send leanness into our souls.

But our Lord's promises, there can be no doubt, have reference chiefly to spiritual blessings. It is in that relation only that they can be accepted without limitation or qualification. When we ask for spiritual blessings, we may know without a shadow of misgiving that we are asking for "good things." In coveting these "best gifts," however earnestly we covet them, we do no wrong to our neighbour, as we may possibly do by too greedily desiring temporal gifts: but we rather seek his good, for our souls are not benefited for our own sakes alone, but for the good of all around us. In ask-

ing for spiritual gifts, therefore, we cannot ask too much, or with too great importunity. God loves to see His children come to Him in their poverty, their nakedness, their blindness, and beg of Him those blessings whereby alone they can be truly enriched, clothed, and enlightened. God loves to hear large prayers; and Christ loves to present large prayers before the throne; for large prayers are evidence of our confidence in the love and faithfulness of God, and in the sympathy and power of the Mediator.

Let not the believing child of God hesitate to prove the LORD by His own Word. "They that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing" (Ps. xxxiv. 10). Even we ourselves, who are naturally evil, and in whose flesh so much that is evil still lingers, and shall linger so long as we are in the body—even we, evil as we are, know how to give good gifts unto our children. We do not mock them: we do not wilfully disappoint them: we do not make them large promises and raise their hopes, only to make them lie down in sorrow. If they ask amiss, we admonish them, and, if necessary, rebuke or punish them: if they ask for good things, we give them to the extent of our ability. How much more, then,—oh, how much more—shall our heavenly Father, to whose power and love there is no limit, but who is able, and through Christ is also willing, to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think—how much more shall our heavenly Father give good things to them that ask Him!

But let it be noted that the promises, large as they are, are only to them that ask. Let no man that does not pray, and that with a pure heart, marvel if he receives not. God will have us trust Him, and depend upon Him alone, to the entire exclusion of all other confidences, for that is for our good; therefore He bids

us ask—in *everything*, no matter how apparently insignificant, by prayer and supplication making our requests known unto Him (Phil. iv. 6). He knoweth what we have need of before we ask; but nevertheless—nay, all the more because He knows—He will have us ask, that we may know, and confess, and feel in our very heart of hearts that it is from Him alone that every good and perfect gift cometh down. And if we have a right apprehension of the nature and necessity of prayer, we may ask with full assurance, and have no cause to faint or be discouraged.

Does any one say, "I have not yet attained to full assurance that I am truly a child of God, or that I have any right to come to Him as a Father?" The answer is, He bids ALL to come! Not those only who have attained to the full assurance of their calling and election, but all—every one that thirsteth—every one that labours and is heavy laden—all are entreated to come, without money and without price. There is not a sinner or a backslider in this world who is not freely bidden to the Gospel supper. By His loving and repeated messages of invitation, God would have all to come in, that His house may be filled. If we are to wait for the full assurance of faith before we begin to pray, we shall never begin, for that blessed assurance is not given save in answer to long and fervent prayer and patience of the saints. We are commanded to give diligence that we may obtain this assurance (2 Pet. i. 10). Let us then be sober, and watch unto prayer. Let us labour, and watch, and wait, praying always. If we do these things, we shall never fall; but in the very going forth of our petitions we shall find the answer. The same ever-blessed Spirit of Truth that prompts the filial cry will bear witness with our spirits that we are

the children of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. He will help our infirmities, making intercession for us with infallible knowledge of what the will of God is (Rom. viii. 26, 27); and thus revealing to us the full and glorious significance of the promise, "Ask, and it shall be given you."

## XXXII.

## THE GOLDEN RULE.

"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."—MATT. vii. 12.

THE precept in this verse may be regarded as a corollary, or inference, from the preceding verses of the chapter, which are themselves supplementary to the instructions previously given concerning vindictiveness, the love of our neighbour, and prayer. As though our Lord had said :—"To sum up what I have been teaching you concerning the duty of man to man, and the duty of seeking constantly the help of your heavenly Father, I now add this precept, *Do to others as you would that others should do to you.* If you desire forgiveness, forgive: if you desire charitable construction of your own words and deeds, take heed that ye yourselves charitably construe the words and deeds of others. As God has declared Himself ready to give to them that ask, and as you desire your fellow-men to help you in your time of need, and treat you with kindness and consideration at all times, so do ye to them. Act in the spirit of your prayers. Pray for what you labour for, and labour for what you pray for: the blessing of God is not for the slothful, but for the diligent. Expect not that God will give you

good things in answer to your prayers, if you are not honestly and faithfully striving to obtain them, and are not at the same time seeking every opportunity to do good and to communicate to others."

The precept now before us is familiar to all professing Christians as THE GOLDEN RULE OF DUTY. It is an expansion of the second great commandment of the law, which the Apostle James calls "The Royal Law" (ii. 8); and which, the Apostle Paul tells us, comprehends the whole Moral law; "For," saith he, "all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Gal. v. 14).* It is, indeed, a most profound and unquestionable truth, that he who loves his neighbour as himself must of necessity love God, with all his heart, and soul, and strength, and mind. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar" (1 John iv. 20). The love we bear to our fellow-men, and our just and sympathizing conduct towards them, are the most conclusive evidences of our love towards God.

It will thus appear that our Lord's Golden Rule, though presented in a new and more expressive form of words, was not substantially a new rule. The very words, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," are found in the Mosaic law (Lev. xix. 18); and in various forms the precept appears in the uninspired writings of the Jews. The celebrated Rabbi Hillel, whom the Jews called "The second Ezra," or "The Restorer of the Law," and who was President of the Sanhedrim at the time our Lord was born, is said to have delivered a maxim so much resembling the Golden Rule, that many have contended that our Lord was in reality quoting from that eminent master in Israel. A Gentile, having applied to

* See above, pp. 245, 246.

be received as a proselyte, requested Hillel to tell him in one sentence the substance of the whole law; to which the Rabbi replied, "Whatsoever thou wouldst not that a man should do to thee, that do not thou to him: that is the whole law."* But in truth, Hillel himself was not the first to enunciate this precept; for it is to be found in the apocryphal Book of Tobit (iv. 15):—"What thou wouldst not that it should be done to thyself, do not thou to another." It was a Latin translation of these words from Tobit ("Quod tibi non vis, alteri ne feceris") that the Roman Emperor Alexander Severus (A.D. 222) had inscribed on the walls of his private chamber. He had been informed that the words were taken from the sacred books acknowledged by both Jews and Christians, and accordingly he showed them much favour, conceiving that *they* could not be dangerous citizens who had such admirable laws.

Even among heathen writers previous to the Christian era, traces of this precept are to be found; and we need not be careful to inquire whether these Gentile moralists obtained their ideas from the Old Testament Scriptures, or from remote or casual association with Jews; for "The Golden Rule" is simply the dictate of conscience and natural justice; and we know that the work or effect of the Moral law, which is the sum of all the teaching of reason and conscience, was written in the hearts of the Gentiles as well as of the Jews (Rom. ii. 14, 15). It is not surprising, therefore, to find an illustrious heathen saying, "What thou wouldst wish one that has authority over thee to do to thyself, that do thou (to those over whom thou hast authority) without solicitation."† The Athenian orator and philosopher Isocrates, writing to Nicocles, king of Cyprus (B.C. 370),

* "Kitto's Cyclopædia of Biblical Literature" (Alexander's), Art. HILLEL.

† Mæcenas, according to Diogenes Laertius.

says, "The things which offend you when you suffer them from others, those things do not to others."* And the philosopher Aristotle, when asked, "How should we behave towards our friends," replied, "As we would wish them to behave towards us."† In all these formulas, however, as well as in those of the Jewish writers previously cited, it will be observed that there is a deficiency either in substance or expression. The precept appears either in a negative form or with a partial application, and thus falls far short of the sublime comprehensiveness of the Golden Rule, which does not simply forbid us to do to others what we would not like them to do to ourselves, but positively enjoins us to DO, and find opportunities for doing, to ALL MEN—not merely to friends or dependents, but to friends and foes alike—ALL THINGS whatsoever we would that they should do to us.

This precept, our Lord adds, "is the law and the prophets." He does not say, This is the sum of all that is contained in the books of the law and of the prophets; for that is not true. But He means rather, that the precept is in harmony with all that is written in the Old Testament Scriptures, and that it is the sum of all that is contained in them concerning the subject to which it relates, namely, the duty of man to man. Our Lord's own life was a continuous exemplification of this precept, and this was one important way in which He fulfilled "the law and the prophets," which His enemies falsely accused Him of endeavouring to destroy. There are many things, however, in the Old Testament Scriptures to

* Gibbon quotes the very words of Isocrates: "Α πάσχοντες ὑφ' ἑτέρων ὀργίζεσθε, ταὐτὰ τοῖς ἄλλοις μὴ ποιεῖτε; and boasts as if he had discovered this precept to be four hundred years older than the Gospel.—*Decline and Fall*, vol. vii. p. 72, ed. 1823.

† Aristotle, according to Diogenes Laertius.

which this Golden Rule has no relation; and therefore, when some have said that this rule comprehends all religious knowledge, and is of itself sufficient for salvation, they must be deemed to have spoken rashly. For, even admitting, as may be safely admitted, that this rule is the sum of the whole Moral law, it is not true that the Moral law alone is sufficient for the salvation of a single sinner. The law is, of itself, the minister of condemnation and eternal death, for, since the Fall, no mere man is able in this life perfectly to obey it. The law convinces us of sin, and pronounces every man guilty before God; but it tells us not how we may be delivered from the condemnation it pronounces. It is from the Gospel that we learn what the law cannot teach us. The Gospel tells us of the Saviour, and of the great salvation that He hath wrought for us: it invites us to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who has fulfilled the whole law, and, being innocent of all transgression, hath suffered for our sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God (1 Pet. iii. 18). "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus," united to Him by a living faith, and giving evidence of their faith and love by a holy life. To him that believeth in Jesus the law is no longer the minister of condemnation, for the believer knows that the righteous vengeance of God has been exhausted, and can do no more against him. The handwriting that was against him is blotted out, and the accusation nailed to the cross of Christ (Col. ii. 14). He now looks to the law as the expression of the Divine holiness, to which, as the son and servant of God, it is his highest ambition to be conformed, and thus he uses the law lawfully (1 Tim. i. 8), namely, as a means of sanctification, and as a perfect rule for his daily walk and conversation. Such is the light in which "The Golden Rule" is to be regarded by professing Christians.

Excellent as it is, we may not exalt it into the Redeemer's mediatorial throne. We may not forget that salvation is of Divine grace, and not by the deeds of the law. But being justified by faith, and having found peace with God, the believer seeks to walk with more and more diligence in the way of God's commandments. For his guidance, accordingly, both in the searching of his heart before God, and the active duties to which he is called in His service, let him take this simple yet far-reaching precept.

Let us first endeavour to ASCERTAIN THE TRUE SIGNIFICATION, AND DETERMINE THE EXTENT, of our Saviour's Golden Rule.

A perfect code of laws for the government of any nation or community would provide for the protection of every individual from aggression, not only against his person and property, but also against his feelings. The laws of all civilized countries prohibit and punish not only violence and robbery, but also insults, slanders, and other offences, by which the self-respect of individuals or the peace of families may be invaded or threatened with invasion. But the laws in such cases made and provided are necessarily very imperfect and inefficacious. The law may inflict fine and imprisonment, or penal servitude, on the man who assaults a peaceable citizen, and deprives him of an eye, or a tooth, or of the use of a limb; or may award to the sufferer exemplary damages from the assailant's property, if he have any; but the law cannot give back the lost eye, or tooth, or limb; and still less can it give any adequate compensation for the pain, the mental annoyance, the hindrance, and other grievances, which have been occasioned to the injured person, and from which he may continue to suffer to the end of his life. But the inadequacy of human laws is

still more conspicuous in cases of offences which are chiefly outrages upon the feelings and affections. If a literary assassin holds up an honourable and virtuous man to reproach and ridicule; if a villain, in the disguise of a gentleman, insinuates himself into the bosom of a respectable family, and destroys its peace by stealing the affections of a wife or daughter; if a man's honour or his heart's dearest hopes are trampled upon by the caprice, the malice, or the vindictiveness of man or woman,—what can the law do for him? It offers him money—money, the very mention of which, under such circumstances, is only an aggravation of the injury, and which is felt by every man of principle to be so utterly inappropriate and inadequate, that he would rather suffer in silence than soil his fingers with the price of his dishonour. And yet, what else can the law offer? Whatever be the outrage committed, human laws can do no more than estimate its value in money, and compel the offender to pay it, if he can, or imprison him if he cannot pay.

The reason of this insufficiency of the law is not a want of wisdom in the legislatures of this world, but the inherent imperfection of human society itself. Our laws, as relating to the redress of injuries, whether of mind, body, or outward estate, are probably as complete as could be devised. Let them be amended as they may, however, they will still be no more than an approximation to perfect justice. For the simple truth is, that society is powerless to make laws for the entire suppression of offences; and for those injuries which are the most grievous it can afford no redress at all. Laws cannot change the hearts of men, and therefore cannot reach the source of crime. Laws cannot repair damages for which there is no pecuniary equivalent: all that the law can do is to punish and deter.

And such will be the state of the world, let political economists and social reformers do all they can, (would it were multiplied a hundred-fold!) so long as the world continues under the dominion of sin. But if it were possible to devise means whereby men could be induced to live according to our Saviour's Golden Rule, there would be no necessity for any other social law. This one precept contains in itself the germ of a perfect code, and is especially stringent in regard to those offences which, from their nature, are beyond the reach of ordinary legislation. This simple rule—"Do unto all men as thou wouldst they should do unto thee,"—would effectually restrain a man from injuring the good name or domestic peace of his neighbour, as well as from injuring him in person or property.

Such then, and nothing less, is the signification and extent of this Divine precept: it places all men on a level of perfect equality in this respect, that each has an equal right to enjoy and retain those gifts which God has either bestowed upon him, or enabled him to acquire. This is the only equality which does or can exist among fallen men in a fallen world. This is true scriptural equality; not the equality raved about by Socialists, Communists, and Red Republicans. To say that all men are equal in the sight of God, is a mere romance. God has not made all men equal, but has made them with the utmost diversity, both as to their physical and intellectual endowments, and as to their social position. He putteth down one, and setteth up another. The children of Ham, who were the founders of the great empires of antiquity, are not now, either physically, intellectually, or socially, the equals of the descendants of Shem; nor are the children of Shem now the equals of the children of Japhet. It is God that maketh one

man to differ from another, and gives to one man more than He gives to another.

But though such be the fact patent to the observation of all men, yet God will not have us presume upon this fact, but commands every one to love his neighbour as himself. This does not mean that we are to pull down the fabric of human society and establish a reign of anarchy and a community of goods, according to the theories of certain revolutionary politicians. Such an equality, if it were possible to establish it, could not continue an hour. With their present passions and corruptions, men would not be content with their equal portions; and strength and cunning would soon wrest property from the hands of feebleness and simplicity. The Word of God does not teach us to attempt to make all men equal; but to respect equally the rights of each: not to plunder the rich, and divide the spoil among the poor; still less to exact from the poor, and aggrandize the rich and powerful. We must take mankind as we find them; some high, some low; some rich, some poor; some white, some black; some civilized, some barbarous; and we are to do and give to every man according to the station in which God has placed him, that which is just and equal. We are to put ourselves in the position of another, and consider how, were we in that position, we should ourselves desire to be treated. No test of justice and equality can be so thorough and effectual as this. No man ever yet hated his own flesh, or desired to be treated with injustice. No man ever yet desired that his own feelings should be lacerated, or any want of consideration exhibited towards him. Let him then act towards his neighbour with the same tenderness, sympathy, and consideration, that he desires to be shown towards himself.

This is scriptural equality: this is even-handed

justice: this is the Law and the Prophets. At the same time, this precept is not to be interpreted so as to contravene anything elsewhere taught in the Word of God. It is quite possible that, in certain situations, a man might wish others to act towards him in a manner altogether unreasonable, and inconsistent with the laws of God and man. In such cases, we should not be justified in doing to others what we, if placed in their circumstances, might wish them to do to us. A child, for example, desires many indulgences which are inconsistent with his real welfare: it would not be right, therefore, for a parent to say, "If I were a child I should wish my parents to grant me such and such indulgences, and therefore I will give them to my own child." A day labourer, it may be, desires his hours to be abridged, his wages increased, and various other considerations and advantages accorded to him; but very possibly his desires may be unreasonable and unjust; and a master or employer is not required to grant such things to his servants on the ground that he himself, if he were a servant, would desire such things; but he is commanded to give to his servants that which is just and equal (Col. iv. 1). Or again: take the case of a juryman trying the guilt or innocence of a prisoner. He would not be justified in saying, "If I were in this prisoner's place, I should wish the jury to find me 'Not guilty;' and therefore, whatever the evidence may be, I shall do all in my power to obtain an acquittal for him." And similarly, in the case of a judge passing sentence upon a convicted criminal. Or, once more: one who is poor in this world's goods, and not rich in faith, may very possibly think it would be an excellent arrangement if his more affluent neighbours were to divide their wealth with him; and a rich man may be quite conscious that, if he were poor, he would desire a

partition of that kind, Such a desire, however, is both unreasonable and unlawful, and no rich man is required to distribute his property in such a manner. Our Lord's precept, in a word, must not be perverted to the justification of anything opposed to common sense, even though we may feel that, in certain circumstances, such and such things would be very agreeable to our self-indulgent natures. We are simply enjoined to put ourselves in the situation of others; to consider how we might, in that situation, reasonably expect to be treated; and to make the result of our consideration the guide for own conduct.

Having thus endeavoured to define the meaning and extent of the Golden Rule, we may now proceed to apply it, according to the definition given, to various circumstances in which men are or may be placed with respect to others.

1. Let the rule be applied to all BUSINESS TRANSACTIONS.

If we go to purchase anything, we expect, or at least we may reasonably expect, that the vendor shall treat us with sincerity and truthfulness. We may expect that he will not give us fourteen or fifteen ounces for a pound, or thirty-four or thirty-five inches for a yard. If the purchaser is not himself a good judge of the quality of articles, or acquainted with the prices current, he may reasonably expect that the merchant or tradesman shall not take advantage of his inexperience, either by stating what is false, or concealing what is true. He would have the merchant consider his interest as well as his own. Similarly the merchant, on his side, very reasonably expects his customers not to put him to unnecessary trouble or loss of time in their negotiations with him, or to subject him to inconvenience by deferring

payments. A poor needlewoman, who has, it may be, several young children depending upon her for a morsel of bread, does not like, when she takes her work home, to be told by the lady who has employed her, or perhaps by the lady's servant, to "call again" for the few shillings she has earned by so many weary stitches; and if she objects, as she may very reasonably object, to the delay, as inconvenient, she does not like to be chidden, and told to look for no further employment there. She likes prompt payment, and kind words. Every one, in every station of life, likes the same. Let us go, then, and "do as we would be done by." On the one hand, let us not ask a shilling for what is only worth elevenpence; and, on the other hand, let us not expect to get for elevenpence what is fairly worth a shilling. Let us be ready to give a fair day's wages for a day's work, and in turn, to give a fair day's work for our day's wages.

2. Let the rule be applied to the ORDINARY INTERCOURSE OF SOCIETY.

Perhaps no better definition of a "gentleman" could be given than that he is a man who conscientiously endeavours to act according to this precept. True politeness is not mere outward refinement of speech and manners, or conformity to the habits of good society. These graces are often exhibited by those who are neither honourable nor kind-hearted, and are not unfrequently used as a cloak for secret vice and cynical malignity. True politeness is founded in gentleness of spirit and sympathetic consideration for the feelings and circumstances of others. It is, in a word, to "do as we would be done by." Outward refinement is not, indeed, to be disparaged: those manners and observances which are suggested by refined taste and experience are necessary for the preservation of peace and decorum, and to prevent assemblies of men and women becoming mere scenes of

disorder and tumult. But after all, refined manners are but the husk or rind of the fruit—the beauty of a corpse or statue; if there be no kernel or pulp within the shell, or if the dead form be not animated by the soul of true honour and gentleness, its outward attractiveness only makes it the more contemptible.

3. Let the rule be applied to the regulation of our conduct in the discharge of what are called the RELATIVE DUTIES. Let husband and wife, parent and child, master and servant, friend and friend, sovereign and subject, take this precept for their guidance. A surprising amount of unreasonableness, bitterness, and estrangement between near relatives and friends would be avoided if this rule were remembered. If parents, for example, would endeavour to recall what their own wishes and feelings were when they were themselves children, and judge, as they should now be able to judge impartially, how far those wishes and feelings were reasonable and lawful, they would at once have a good guide in the management of their families. The three things essential in the government of children are firmness, kindness, and truth. Firmness without kindness provokes to anger and rebellion. Kindness without firmness only invites disobedience and contempt. And neither kindness nor firmness can be effectual without truth. Never deceive a child. Children like to be under a firm hand, and generally have a strong sense of justice and candour. When those who are now parents were themselves children, they fully appreciated fair, kind, and candid treatment from their own parents and teachers. Let them do even so to their children and pupils. And let the same principle regulate all the other relations of life.

4. In the ADMINISTRATION OF TEMPORAL CHARITY, also, this precept will be found a golden rule.

Let a man whose cup of worldly prosperity is full

imagine himself in circumstances of poverty, sickness, or distress, and ask himself how he would wish, and might reasonably expect, to be treated in a Christian land! Had the priest and the Levite in our Lord's parable acted in accordance with this rule, when they saw the poor traveller lying by the road-side, wounded and half-dead, they would not have passed by on the other side. If what is called "the charitable public" acknowledged this rule, we should not have our charitable institutions so often in an embarrassed condition, dragging on a painful and burdened existence. If men who call themselves Christians really strove to fulfil the law of Christ, to bear one another's burdens, to love one another as He loved them, or, in one word, to "do as they would be done by," they would not wait till their alms were solicited, but would themselves go and find out the poor and the sick, and give relief, with kindly sympathy and prayers. If we ourselves were poor and sick, that is what we should wish others to do to us. So, then, let us do.

5. Have we received an injury or an offence from another? Let us forgive, as we would desire to be forgiven. Have we ourselves injured or offended another? Let us make apology and reparation, even as we would that others should do to us.

6. So also in judging of the actions and motives of others. We desire, and reasonably, that our own words and deeds should be favourably and charitably construed; that allowances should be made for our peculiar temptations and provocations; that an opportunity should be afforded us of offering explanations; that we should not be made offenders for a word. Do we, then, always treat others thus? Do we always show to other men the same patience and consideration that we expect to be shown to ourselves?

7. Finally, let this Golden Rule direct us in our intercourse with Christians of other denominations.

How much sectarian animosity, wrath, and strife would be avoided if this rule were remembered! If we remembered that we are indeed one body, and that we have a common Head; if we sought more earnestly the holy unction that descends from the Head to all the members of the body,—we should not be so ready to call each other hard names, and impute to each other the basest motives.

Let us do to all men, and especially to those who, though they may not worship God according to the same outward forms with ourselves, have the same "precious faith"—let us do to all our brethren of mankind, not as they do to us, but as we would they should do to us. This one law, rightly apprehended, would be sufficient for the perfection of human society. So far as the intercourse of man with man is concerned, we can hope for nothing more than this, when the kingdom of God shall have come, and His will shall be done in earth as it is done in heaven!

## XXXIII.

## THE BROAD AND NARROW WAYS.

"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:
"Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."—MATT. vii. 13, 14.

OUR Lord's Golden Rule of duty, the sum of all that is contained in the Word of God concerning human intercourse, relationships, and obligations, has extorted the admiration, not only of Christians, but of Jews and heathens, and of infidels who call themselves philosophers. At the same time it prescribes a standard of life so high, that the question rises unbidden to our lips, "Who then can be saved?" With man, fallen and frail as he is, the practice of this sublime morality is confessedly impossible: we cannot attain unto it. It is, nevertheless, after this unattainable perfection that we are commanded to labour, as diligently and persistently as though the attainment were within our reach. Nor is it in mockery that we are so commanded; for though salvation on the condition of perfect obedience is with man impossible, it is not so with God. That righteousness and that salvation which we cannot accomplish of ourselves, we may obtain from God; and thus, in the previous verses, our

Lord had exhorted His hearers to ask, in the full assurance that it should be given them. To ask simply, however, is not enough; we must also strive. And this is what our Lord now proceeds to teach and enforce. In the verses now before us He urges to earnest and steadfast effort, not concealing the difficulties and dangers that must be encountered, but rather making these an argument for greater perseverance, "Enter ye in at the strait gate," cease not to knock until the door is opened; for so long as ye continue without there can be no safety.

In this most instructive and familiar passage the life of man is compared to a journey. And such truly it is —a journey through the wilderness of this world. In this wilderness there is much that is attractive, and well worthy of admiration. In its physical aspect it is full of beauty and sublimity. The lofty mountains, the foaming torrents, the ocean in calm and in storm, excite our wonder and awe; while the verdant landscape, the rippling stream, the sunny flowers, and the song of birds awaken emotions of a more tranquil and tender character. In its moral aspect, also, our wilderness is replete with attractions. The moral qualities and virtues of the natural man—honour, and gratitude, and friendship, and patriotism, and generosity—all these, and many others, more or less prominently challenge the admiration of even the most degraded of mankind. And yet, notwithstanding its many charms, the world is, after all, a waste howling wilderness. The serpent lies concealed among its choicest flowers; the raven croaks amidst its most luxuriant foliage; and in its most peaceful glades the roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.

Through this wilderness we are all journeying, never

standing still, even for a moment. The learned and devout Archbishop Leighton had his mind so thoroughly impressed with the idea that life was a journey, that he frequently said, if he might choose the place of his death, it should be an inn.* Would that we were all more alive to the fact that we are travellers—strangers and pilgrims passing through a strange country—all bound for the same inn, the common and final resting-place for all wayfarers, the house appointed for all living. At that *terminus* we may arrive at any moment; we are constantly moving towards it, and have no power either to retrace a single step, or to retard for an instant the noiseless, ceaseless march of time. It is therefore of infinite importance to every man that he should assure himself that he is travelling on the right road. For this journey of life is travelled by two roads, both, indeed, passing through the gate of death, but thence diverging for ever, the one leading to everlasting destruction, the other to eternal life. These two roads are respectively called the broad way and the narrow way; and it is to these that our attention is now invited.

I. Let us first consider what we are taught concerning the BROAD WAY.

This is the road with which we are first acquainted. Our natural birth is the "wide gate," by which every son and daughter of Adam enters into this world, and commences his journey upon the broad way. Every man begins his natural life upon the broad way, not of

* "In such a place," says Leighton's biographer, "he thought that a Christian believer might properly finish his pilgrimage; the whole world being to him but a large and noisy inn, and he a wayfarer, tarrying in it as short a time as possible, and then hasting away to his Father's house. . . . . This singular wish was gratified, for he breathed his last in the Bell Inn, Warwick Lane."—PEARSON'S "Life of Leighton," prefixed to Works, 1829, p. 76.

choice, but of necessity. The broad way is the way of sin and death; and as our natural condition is one of sin and death, as we are conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity, it is not possible for us to begin this life otherwise than by entering in at the wide gate, and proceeding along the broad way.

But this most unquestionable scriptural truth is very frequently forgotten, or tacitly repudiated. There is a sort of notion, even in the minds of many that have been taught the holy Scriptures from their youth, that we begin our lives on *neutral ground*, and that it is in our own power, when we come to years of discretion, to select one or other of the two roads that are open before us. Much of the difficulty attending the "conviction of sin" arises from misapprehension on this point. Those especially who have not been gross sinners, are very hardly persuaded to believe that they are really by nature enemies of God, and guilty of everlasting death. It is therefore the most culpable unfaithfulness in ministers, parents, or teachers to keep back, or in any way to palliate or gloze over the unpalatable truth, that all men are born sinners and children of wrath. To talk of the innocence of unborn babes, the spotlessness of infants, and the purity of childhood, is only to speak smooth things and prophesy deceits (Isa. xxx. 10). Writers on education have sometimes compared the mind of man at his birth to a sheet of blank paper, or to melted wax, ready to receive any writing or impression. Others advocate the importance of early education, by comparing the child to a young tree: "Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclined," and so forth. In all this, no doubt, there is some truth; but it is not all truth; or rather, the truth is used to conceal a fundamental error. It may be true that the mind of man at birth is *intellectually* inert and passive, and that

we are destitute of original ideas; at least, if this be not strictly and philosophically true, it may be admitted for the sake of the argument. But it is most assuredly not true that the mind of man at birth is a *moral* blank; for it is impressed with evil before he is born. We are shapen in iniquity, in sin have our mothers conceived us (Ps. li. 5). This is no metaphor, but sober and severe truth. We do not come into this world morally resembling straight seedlings from the gardener's nursery; we are, on the contrary, knotted and gnarled and crooked from the very seed-pot, and grow with evil shoots and perverse inclinations. The best that can be said of a new-born babe is, that it is free from *actual sin*; but the corrupt seed is in it, and develops itself in waywardness and disobedience before many days. Little children are not born pure and innocent beings, but polluted and guilty. From the moment of their birth they are travelling upon the broad way of sin and death, and they cannot do otherwise than continue so to travel, until they are effectually called by the power of Divine grace, and a great spiritual change passes upon them.

All of us, then, begin the journey of life upon the broad way. It is, indeed, emphatically *the broad way*, for it is the way of all those who desire unlimited licence to go whithersoever they will, obeying the lusts of their own hearts, and doing whatsoever is right in their own eyes, disdaining the restraints of God's law, and saying, "Let us break His bands asunder, and cast away His cords from us" (Ps. ii. 3). The way is broad, for there is ample room in it for every diversity of human talent, taste, and character. The open scoffer at Divine truth, the atheist, the idolater, the blasphemer, the Sabbath-breaker, the disobedient, the revengeful, the impure, the fraudulent, the liar, the covetous,—concerning these there will be no question. But upon this way are found

numbers of men and women who look with horror upon these coarser and more repulsive forms of sin; numbers who appear to think that vice is evil, not because it is morally wrong, but because it is gross; not because it offends against reason or conscience, but because it offends the eye or the nostril; not because it is contrary to the law of God, but because it is contrary to the laws and usages of refined society. The mere intellectual believer, who assents to the truths of Christianity in the same way that he assents to the truths of history or abstract science; the nominal Christian, who professes to know God, but in works denies Him; the formal hypocrite, whose religion is in his face, or his dress, or his actions that are seen of men; the children of gaiety and fashionable folly, "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God;" all, in short, that are walking according to the course of this world, laying up treasure, and finding their chief delights in earth and not in heaven,—all these are travelling on the broad way, each one walking in his own path, and by the light of his own fire (Isa. l. 11), and each one fancying himself right, or at least not far wrong, because he has not the vices or failings of the rest.

In this broad way men may walk without much trouble or thought. Indeed, it is impossible to miss it. There are various tracks and by-paths and cross-ways leading hither and thither, and distracting the mind; but let a man take which he will, he is always advancing along the same broad way, in the same fatal direction. The butterflies of this world, as they flit from flower to flower, sipping a little honey here, and a little nectar there, fancy they are doing no harm; the sluggard, the drone of the hive, as he lounges on his bed of ease, dreaming the hours away, fancies he is doing nothing: but both are fatally mistaken; they are making a stage of their

life's journey, and making sure and rapid progress upon the broad way.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find our Lord saying, "Many there be which go in thereat." There is no lack of society on this great highway. One may find fellow-travellers of every complexion, of every character, and from every clime. They who like to go with the crowd may find on this road the very crowd to which their peculiar sympathies and proclivities incline them. The way is very broad, and there is room for all sorts of travellers, or parties of travellers, to proceed upon it without collision or confusion, if they choose to do so. Those also who are influenced by human authority and example may find ample inducement and encouragement in their career upon this road. Thousands of the wise and learned, thousands of the noble, the wealthy, and powerful, are constantly travelling on the broad way: many of its most beaten paths are in high estimation among men. Yea, so much is this the case, that many who have all their lives been steadily and easily journeying on this way, and maintaining a blameless reputation in the world, have no suspicion that they are going in a wrong direction, and would repel with indignation and resentment the gentlest word of warning whispered in their ears. Many consider it in the last degree uncharitable to speak of the majority of mankind as being in the broad way. And no doubt, if any man presumed to speak thus on his own authority, he might justly be accused of dealing damnation wholesale, and of transgressing the law of charity, which enjoins us to think no evil. But it is not man that speaks thus. The sentence, "Many there be which go in thereat," is not the judgment of man, but of Him to whom all judgment is committed; and it is only as His judgment that His ministers presume to repeat it. It is no breach of

charity to tell men the truth for their own good. It is not with feelings of asperity, but as of God, in sincerity and in sorrow, in the sight of God, that these things are spoken.

Alas! this is a matter in which the faithful ambassador for Christ dare not heal the hurts of men slightly, or cry, "Peace and safety," when death, judgment, and eternity are so near; and we know neither the day nor the hour when the sound of the last trumpet may be heard, and the heavens and the earth be rent asunder by the throes of the last convulsion. This way, on which so many are journeying, broad as it is, crowded as it is, free and unrestricted as it appears to be, leadeth to destruction! It is a way that seemeth right to many, but the end thereof is death (Prov. xiv. 12). The thoughtless, giddy sons and daughters of men pursue this way, and turn a deaf ear when wisdom cries aloud. But they know not, or remember not, that it is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death (Prov. vii. 27).

II. Let us turn, then, to the consideration of the other of the two ways spoken of—the NARROW WAY, which is entered by the STRAIT GATE.

All mankind having entered this world by the same wide gate, their natural birth, continue, by moral necessity, or by the force of their inborn corrupt propensities, to travel on the broad way, and must at length fall into the everlasting destruction in which that way terminates, if they are not by God's sovereign grace called out of it, and enabled to enter the strait gate and tread upon the narrow way.

The instruction here given cannot be fully apprehended without a knowledge of the Gospel; but the language is eminently fitted to awaken inquiry, and to

lead to the knowledge of the truth. As the broad way is the way of sin and death, so it naturally follows, that the narrow way is the way of righteounsess and life. But under the law as a covenant of works, righteousness cannot be achieved; for no man is able to keep the law perfectly. They, therefore, who seek eternal life by the righteousness of the law, are still upon the broad way, and must so continue until they understand and submit to the righteousness of God. It is in Christ alone that the righteousness of God without the law is made manifest—even that righteousness which is offered unto all men through faith in Jesus Christ, and is actually communicated unto all that truly believe in His name. The strait gate and the narrow way must be understood, therefore, as indicating the only true way of salvation, or, as our Lord Himself designates it, "the way which leadeth unto life."

A gate or door is an entrance into an enclosure, which fences off or separates some part of the earth's surface from the other part that is without. Such an enclosure is the Church of Christ, which is either visible or invisible. The Visible Church of Christ includes all those who outwardly profess to believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. The gate admitting to the Visible Church is the outward ordinance of baptism. The whole number of baptized Christians in the world at any given period is thus enclosed or paled off, so to speak, from the rest of the human race, —Jews, Mohammedans, and heathen nations. But the Visible Church contains many who are not true Christians, and are as far from the way of life as if they were literally heathens. The term "Church of Christ," therefore, in its strict and proper sense, belongs only to the Invisible Church—that is, the whole company of true believers, in all ages and in all places. The gate or

door admitting to this, the true enclosure, the true sheepfold, the true house of the living God, is Christ Himself; and the act of entering in is called regeneration, or conversion. This is that new birth of the soul which is the beginning of eternal life. It is the result, in every case, of the direct operation of the Holy Ghost, and is accompanied by repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. Of this washing of regeneration the outward washing with water in the sacrament of baptism is only the outward sign or symbol. "I am the door," are the words of Jesus: "By Me if any man enter in he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (John x. 9). There is no other gate but Christ by which any man can enter into the true sheepfold. All that enter by Him—that is, all that have received power from Him by the baptism of the Holy Ghost to become sons of God—no matter by what ceremony they have been admitted—no matter if they have been admitted without any visible ceremony at all—are lawfully within the pale, and "are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph. ii. 19). But whosoever enters by any other way, whether by climbing over or breaking through the fence, or by assuming the character of God's children while he is yet in his sins—every intruder of this sort, our Lord declares, "is a thief and a robber" (John x. 1). Such a man may no doubt mingle with the true sheep, and so far conform to their habits as to deceive the shepherds of the visible fold; but he cannot deceive the Chief Shepherd, who discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Let it therefore be deeply impressed upon our minds, as an essential and fundamental truth, that however men may deceive themselves and each other, there is no other gate of entrance into the company of the

redeemed but Christ; no way of entering in at this gate but by being born of the Spirit; and that none but those who have thus entered can possibly be travelling upon the narrow way which leadeth unto life.

"Strait is the gate." The word "strait" means not only *narrow*, but also *confined*. A bridle-track through the bush is narrow, but not strait, for there is nothing to prevent the traveller from getting off it. A lane between two fences is strait: so also is an opening between two posts, by which a man may get into a paddock, but not a horse or a cow, nor even a man if he be carrying a burden or be encumbered with much clothing. The word "strait" implies, accordingly, that there is some difficulty in entering the gate. And such undoubtedly is the case; for we find our Lord saying in another place, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and *shall not be able*" (Luke xiv. 24). These words have occasioned considerable perplexity. Some, who pretend to hold Calvinistic principles, but have not accurately informed themselves on the whole subject, have imagined that the inability to enter, of which our Lord speaks, is simply the effect of God's decree of reprobation or pretermission—that they *cannot* enter because they *may not*—because, in a word, they are excluded. Then, on the other hand, those who hold Arminian principles, supposing the view just given to be a correct statement of Calvinistic doctrine, have been led to recoil with horror from those doctrines, as inconsistent with the free proclamation of the Gospel and the invitations of Divine love to all sinners. This is not the place for a vindication of Calvinistic doctrines. Suffice it to say, that both the parties referred to labour under a misapprehension. The inability of which our Lord speaks is moral, not *physical*, or *of necessity;* and is the effect of a

corrupt will. The gate, though it be strait, is wide enough to admit all that come and truly seek admission in the right way. If any cannot enter, it is not because they *may* not, but because they *will* not.

It does, no doubt, appear somewhat paradoxical to say that a man seeks to enter in at the strait gate, and yet cannot enter by reason of his unwillingness. The difficulty arises from not distinguishing between *desire* and *will*. We have seen that the only way of entrance is by regeneration, repentance, and faith. Now, those that seek to enter, and are not able, because not willing, are those that seek to enter by some other way—that is, without repentance and faith. Many, for example, seek to enter, because they have a slavish apprehension of danger in the broad way, and a general belief that safety is to be found in the narrow way. They do not wish to escape from their sins, but from the consequences of their sins; and therefore they try to enter, carrying their sins with them. But the gate is too strait to admit them while so encumbered; and they cannot enter, simply because they will not leave their sins behind them.

Many also seek to enter in at the strait gate and are not able, because they suffer themselves to be held back by the persuasions or by the ridicule of others. Ungodly relatives and acquaintances have always worldly arguments to entice, and scornful sneers to fling at, passengers who are going right on their ways (Prov. ix. 15); and too often these efforts are successful. Every day we may see men unable to enter, because they will not resolutely break away from those that surround them, and stop their ears against the siren song of worldly society and worldly pleasures.

Many again, just when they are about to enter, are tempted to look back, and linger, by the remembrance

of something they have left in the world they are forsaking; and before they recover themselves, night overtakes them, death strikes them, and the gate is finally closed against them. Then, indeed, they may seek to enter in, but they shall not be able. They shall eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices (Prov. i. 31).

Let us suppose, however, that the strait gate has been really entered in the legitimate manner, and that the Divine life of faith has been really begun: this is not all that is necessary to life eternal: we have still to tread the narrow way. We are not in Canaan when we have crossed the Red Sea: our pilgrimage through the "great and terrible wilderness" is then only begun. The narrow way is in every respect different from the broad way. It is not so plain or so beaten, and hence it is easily missed. It is narrow, not strait like the entrance gate, and therefore we may easily stray from it. It is true, indeed, that none that have once truly entered by the door into the sheepfold can ever permanently lose their way, or finally fail of attaining to eternal life; for none really enter by the door but the sons of God; and for their salvation the everlasting promises of God are engaged, and no man is able to pluck them out of the Father's hand (John x. 29). Nevertheless, they are often drawn aside by divers temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and for a longer or shorter time they wander in darkness and doubt. But the good Shepherd Himself, who watches for their souls, brings them back by the rod of affliction, and anoints their eyes with the heavenly eyesalve, that they may see their way more clearly.

The way is narrow, and he that would keep from wandering must take heed to his going, that he turn

neither to the right hand nor to the left. Oftentimes we find it rough, hard, stony, and thorny; but we may not turn aside to seek a smoother path: our course is right onward. Neither persecution nor flattery must be suffered to beguile us out of the right way; for there can be but one right way, and every other way must be false. Enemies, many and powerful, oppose our march: we must not evade them, but resist them in the strength of the Lord. Our life is a warfare, and we must needs fight our way. If we attempt to go round about, or take a by-path, we get off the track. This way is also a way of affliction; for the word translated "narrow"* is the same that is elsewhere used to express tribulation; and nothing is more certain than that through much tribulation, in some shape or other, we must enter the kingdom of God (Acts xiv. 22). Whatever betide us, we must steadfastly hold on our way to Zion with our faces thitherward, looking for our consolation, not to this present vale of tears, but to the hope of unfading glory that is set before us, which God, that cannot lie, hath promised before the world began.

Such being the strait gate, and such the narrow way, can we be surprised when our Lord adds, "Few there be that find it?" Is not this just what may be expected from the condition of fallen man? The majority are so careless about eternity, that they will not look for the gate, and cannot be persuaded that they have any cause for anxiety. Many are deceived by false prophets, who cry, Lo, here is Christ! or lo, there! Many fancy that eternal life may be attained by some other way, apparently less rugged, and requiring less self-denial, instead of seeking for that Divine love which makes the rough places plain, the yoke easy, and the burden light. And many persist in laying the flattering unction to their

* τεθλιμμένη. Compare 2 Cor. i. 6; Rev. ii. 9, 10, &c.

souls, that, after all, even if they do not hit upon the right way, God is too merciful to damn them. Alas, what blindness! what infatuation!

Am I well assured that I am journeying upon the narrow way? Let me not hesitate to commit myself wholly to the guidance of Him who will make me to lie down in green pastures, and lead me by the waters of quietness! Let me not hesitate between delusive pleasures which lead to endless woe, and temporary difficulties which lead to endless joy! Let me rather persevere in the good way which, by the grace of God, I have been enabled to choose. In the world, for a few short years, or days, I must expect tribulation; but let me be of good cheer: my Lord hath overcome the world!

## XXXIV.

## FALSE PROPHETS.

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

"Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

"A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

"Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

"Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."—MATT. vii. 15–20.

THAT section of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount which has been last considered—namely, that comprised in the thirteenth and fourteenth verses of the chapter now before us, may be regarded as the most important of the whole; for though, as has been remarked, it does not contain a formal enunciation of the Gospel, it directly leads to it, and cannot be fully understood without an acceptance of the whole system of doctrinal and practical Christianity. It was only to be expected, therefore, that our Lord's teaching concerning the broad and narrow ways should attract a large share of attention, and that various interpretations should be proposed, according to the endless varieties of human fancies and opinions. They may, however, be reduced to two, which may be distinguished

as the moral, and the evangelical interpretations. According to the moral interpreters, the narrow way is the way of virtue; the broad way is the way of vice; and repentance and reformation of life is the strait gate by which men must leave the broad and enter upon the narrow way. But to this interpretation there is this fatal objection, that repentance and reformation cannot expiate the sins of the past life, and do not enable the penitent and reformed man to live the remainder of his life without sin. For it must be remembered that the whole obedience of our whole lives is due to God: He who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity, will accept nothing less than an absolutely perfect righteousness. But this no man has to offer. If, therefore, human virtue or righteousness be the narrow way, this cannot be the way that leadeth unto life.

In the exposition which has been offered, the evangelical interpretation has been adopted, according to which the wide gate is our natural birth into this world, and the broad way the course of life which every man follows by nature. The strait gate is Christ Himself, and the entering in at that gate is the new or spiritual birth of the soul, or regeneration, without which a man cannot enter into the kingdom of God. The narrow way, on which none can tread but those who have come in by the strait gate, is the way of faith and holiness, by which, through many trials and afflictions, believers must gradually advance towards the mansions of eternal glory. Such appears to be the only interpretation consistent with Scripture and sound reason. For as there is but one true God, there can only be one true religion; and that must be the religion which teaches the true way of salvation, and the only true and acceptable way of worshipping God—the religion which teaches salvation by

Jesus Christ, who declares, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by ME" (John xiv. 6).

If, then, there be only one narrow way that leadeth to life; if the entrance to that way be by a strait gate; if by reason of the straitness of the gate and the narrowness of the way there be few that find them; and if, consequently, the mass of mankind are travelling on that broad way which leadeth to destruction,—no other consideration can be necessary to give emphasis to the warning voice addressed to us in the verses now to be considered, "Beware of false prophets!" It is not too much to say, that by the lies of false prophets, at one time speaking with flattering lips, at another inspiring superstitious fears, more are kept from the right way than by all the violence and persecution of overt enemies.

The designation of "prophets" is given, both in the Old and New Testaments, not only to those who foretold future events, but also to those who were authorized by God to declare His Word, or to assist in the public worship of the sanctuary. The sons of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, who were set apart for the service of song in the house of the Lord, were prophets, and prophesied —that is, gave thanks and praised the Lord, "with harps, with psalteries, and with cymbals" (1 Chron. xxv. 1–3). From the days of the Judges there were regular "schools of the prophets" in Israel; and it would appear that those who were educated in these schools formed a sort of prophetical profession, and were known throughout the land as "prophets," though they might never receive any special commission from God. Nor were those who did receive special commissions always selected from the ranks of the professional prophets. Thus we find Amos saying to King Amaziah, "I was no prophet,

neither was I a prophet's son; but I was a herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit; and the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel" (Amos vii. 14). John the Baptist, also, the first of the New Testament prophets, was designated to the prophetical office before his birth, and received no training in the schools. And, in short, while there is nothing in Scripture to disparage professional education for sacred offices, we are plainly taught that no education is of itself sufficient to qualify for such offices, without that calling of God which He by His Spirit giveth to those whom He designs to employ.

Under the New Testament dispensation, the designation of "prophet" was given to preachers of the Word, and especially to those who preached by Divine inspiration, whether they predicted future events or not. The gift of "prophecy" was one of the "gifts of the Holy Spirit," and was enjoyed and exercised by many in the Apostolic age, who were neither Apostles, nor ordinary pastors of the Church. Before the close of the first century, however, we find the Apostle John earnestly echoing our Lord's warning: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John iv. 1). In those primitive times the Visible Church was peculiarly exposed to the impostures of designing men, who assumed the character of apostles and prophets, and claimed audience as divinely commissioned expositors of Divine truth. The majority of professing Christians in those days were very imperfectly instructed; copies of the inspired writings were few, and not at all times accessible; and thus many who had embraced the Gospel with ardour were easily drawn aside from the simplicity of the Gospel by those who

made a fair show in the flesh for the beguiling of unstable souls. Such is the simple explanation of the success which attended some of the heresies of the earlier centuries. As in the days of the Jewish dispensation false prophets had abounded, and had misled the people to their destruction, so our Lord warns His disciples and the multitudes that had assembled to hear Him, that there should still be false prophets, men assuming the character of true prophets, and pretending to deliver a message from God, whom God had not sent, but who should teach doctrines and practices in opposition to the Gospel of Christ. Nor can we suppose that the necessity for this warning ceased when the prophetical and miraculous age had passed away. The ordinary pastors of the Church, who are lawfully called to the office of the holy ministry, and who faithfully declare the Word of God as revealed in the holy Scriptures, are the lawful successors of the Apostles and prophets, and are recognized by the Church as ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God, even though they have no miraculous gifts. Many, however, have thrust themselves, or have been thrust by others, into the office of the ministry, who have given no evidence that they had been called of God, and who have, by their false doctrine and corrupt lives, proved a cause of stumbling to those without the Church, and of reproach to those within.

It is, therefore, a question of the gravest importance, WHO ARE, AND WHO ARE NOT, TRUE PROPHETS, OR MINISTERS OF CHRIST?

The answer usually given to this question by evangelical Christians is, that they are true ministers of Christ who have received the inward call of the Holy

Spirit, and who, having given evidence of such inward call, have received also the outward call of some congregation or branch of the Visible Church, and have been solemnly ordained, or invested with the office, by the laying on of the hands of a Presbytery. All Christian Churches at least, whatever differences may exist among them as to the outward call and the outward ordination, profess to hold that no man ought to be admitted to the office of the ministry who has not given evidence that he has been inwardly called. In practice, unhappily, a most culpable laxity has prevailed. When Christianity became nominally the religion of the civilized world, and the regular ministry had been not only organized but supplemented by the creation of various functionaries not named in Scripture, and of very doubtful expediency, the ministry, or the priesthood, as it began to be called, became a profession, which men embraced, as they embraced any other profession, for the sake of obtaining temporal subsistence. In days when absolute illiteracy was the rule, and literary acquirement the exception, any aptitude for letters was recognized as a qualification for the clerical profession; and thus a cleric, or clerk, came to mean one who could read and write. In the mediæval centuries, thousands were admitted to "holy orders" who had not even this qualification; and a much greater number were admitted who were totally ignorant of the Latin language, in which the services were performed, and which they repeated by rote. Can it be wondered that these were "dark ages?" Can it be wondered that, when at length a knowledge of letters was revived in Europe, and the Word of God was, in spite of the opposition of the Romish clergy, circulated among men in their own tongues, a great shaking took place among the dry bones, and the yoke of the Papacy was indignantly

thrown off by all to whom the light of Gospel truth came?

But though the Reformation swept away many of the superstitions and corruptions of the previous centuries, it was not all at once that the qualifications for the ministerial office came to be thoroughly understood. Even in the present day there is by no means a universal consent on this subject, and there is an acknowledged difficulty in carrying sound principles into practice. In all established systems there is a tendency to adhere to a certain routine. Churches prescribe a certain standard of literary and theological attainments, and a certain course of education, for candidates for the ministry. When these have been accomplished, and the required examinations have been more or less satisfactorily sustained, there has frequently been no further inquiry beyond requiring a formal certificate of outwardly consistent walk and conversation. Within the last half-century a great change for the better has been witnessed. The Evangelical Churches have shown a more lively sense of their responsibility; and there has been a general desire, not only that ministers of the Gospel should be men of sound education and general information, and thus be competent to deal with mankind in an age of progress, but also that they should possess the higher qualification of the call of the Holy Spirit. The necessity of this highest qualification has been always formally acknowledged; but it cannot be denied, that the examination of candidates with a view to ascertain its existence has been at all times too superficial, and in many cases has been altogether neglected.

And this neglect is sought to be justified on the alleged ground, that such inquiries are seldom satisfactory, and that it is scarcely possible to make them so. Many, whose standing and experience entitle their sen-

timents to be received with deference, consider it unwise to press too closely our inquiries as to the inward call. It is the province of God alone, they remind us, to read the heart, and we have no right to pronounce judicially on a man's sincerity or spiritual state, provided there be nothing in his walk and conversation inconsistent with his views. And, so far as private Christians are concerned, there might be no difficulty in assenting to this principle; but when the question relates to the admission of persons to the office of the ministry in Christ's Church, the case becomes altogether different. If a man seek to be recognized by the Visible Church as a minister of Christ, and to be admitted to the exercise of sacred functions, he ought surely to give some evidence that Christ has chosen him. It involves a palpable contradiction to suppose that Christ has called a man to labour in His vineyard, and yet has not endowed him with the gifts necessary for the work, or given him opportunities for acquiring the necessary knowledge and skill. Above all, there appears a striking absurdity in supposing that Christ has called a man to be His ambassador, who does not exhibit even the ordinary signs of conversion, and is wholly ignorant of experimental religion. No outward ordination can make such a man a true prophet. He may have the official character stamped upon him by the hands of men laid suddenly upon his head; but he lacks that essential qualification, without which the tongues of men and of angels, the highest intellectual gifts, and the most unblemished outward morals, are the mere decorations of a sepulchre.

The doctrine of the Church of Rome, of the Oxford Tractarians, and of their more recent followers, the Anglican Ritualists,—the doctrine that true prophets are distinguished from the false by episcopal ordination,

conveyed in direct succession from the Apostles, must therefore be repudiated as entirely fallacious. No such unbroken succession can be proved in any one case; and if it could be proved, this would not prove that the individual possessing it was a true prophet, or that others who have it not were false prophets. The question whether a man be, or be not, a lawful minister of Christ, does not depend upon the form and manner of his ordination, or on the official status of his ordainers, or on any ecclesiastical genealogy, or on any external and ceremonial qualification whatsoever. The Christian people are not to be told that every man who receives the official character, and is ecclesiastically invested with the "sheep's clothing," is on that account alone to be received as a true prophet. They have need, rather, as our blessed Lord foresaw, to be warned against false prophets, who, though in outward appearance resembling the true, are "blind guides," and, so far from being qualified teachers, have need themselves to be instructed in the first principles of Divine truth.

These observations are not made to impugn the expediency of proper ecclesiastical regulations. The ordination of ministers to their office by the imposition of hands is an institution of Christ, perpetuated by apostolic example and authority, and by the practice of the Church Catholic in all ages. It is essential to the due communication of the official character, and this it can do; *but it can do no more.* It may be admitted, also, that to those who have already been duly admitted to the office belongs the right of judging of the qualifications of those who may seek to be admitted. But we have no warrant for believing in ecclesiastical infallibility; and men are not justified in accepting any man's teaching solely because he may have been regularly ordained. He may be officially a minister, and

yet a false prophet. And it is quite possible that a man may be a true prophet who has never received the official character from the hands of man. The history of the Church amply demonstrates that lawfully ordained ministers may teach the most flagrant heresies, and that men who have received no official investiture may be honoured by God as true prophets.

We are now prepared to inquire, WHAT IS THE TEST BY WHICH FALSE PROPHETS MAY BE DISTINGUISHED FROM THE TRUE? And the answer is supplied by our Lord Himself: "Ye shall know them by their FRUITS."

Observe how emphatically the Divine COUNSELLOR warns His hearers against being deceived by mere outward appearance. False prophets come in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. We may compare with this passage our Lord's words, which have been recently quoted in connexion with "the strait gate," * but which are generally considered to have reference also to the admission of pastors to their office: "He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep" (John x. 1, 2). Papists and Ritualists tell us that "the door" is episcopal ordination; but Christ says "I am the door." From the two passages we may gather our Lord's meaning to be, that they alone are true prophets, or pastors of His flock, who enter by the door, that is, by the appointment and call of Christ Himself. He that entereth not in by this door may no doubt succeed in gaining admission to the sheepfold, or Visible Church, and may outwardly fulfil the duties of a shepherd; but he has

* See above, pp. 529, 530.

climbed up some other way—he has gained admission by force or fraud—and is not a true shepherd of the sheep. He may wear a prophet's mantle of sheep's skin, or a robe of white linen, or silk, or woollen stuff, wrought with "divers colours of needlework on both sides" (Judges v. 30); but neither the clothing he wears, nor the official character he may have received, can make him a true prophet: inwardly he is a ravening wolf, a hireling, and a robber, who has sought the office of a shepherd, not that he may feed and tend the sheep of Christ's pasture, but that he may spoil them for his own ambitious or covetous ends.

It is not by their clothing, then, but by their FRUITS, that false prophets are to be known. And this may be interpreted in a threefold manner—namely, as applying to the lives of the men, to the doctrines they teach, or to the results which follow their labours.

1. False prophets are to be known by *the fruits they exhibit in their lives.*

Our Lord taught the people to apply this test to the scribes and Pharisees, the "high ceremonial" party in the Church that then was. They sat in Moses' seat (Matt. xxiii. 2); whatsoever they taught the people therefore out of Moses' law, the people were bound to receive; "but," added our Lord, "do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not." They had the official character of authorized teachers; but they were not true shepherds, for they did not themselves keep the law of which they were the professional expounders. It may be safely inferred that a man who by his life and conversation shows that he is actuated by worldly or carnal motives is a false prophet, and has not come in by the door, though he may come in sheep's clothing, and may have been admitted to the pastoral office with every circumstance of ecclesiastical formality.

It does, no doubt, sometimes happen that men preach sound doctrine with distinguished ability and fervency of spirit whose lives are not such as becometh the Gospel of Christ, though they are careful to avoid incurring ecclesiastical discipline. A man who has received a sound professional education may have a thorough knowledge of Christian doctrine, and yet may be personally a stranger to the regenerating influences of the Holy Ghost. Such a man may preach the truth; and the truth, which is God's, and not man's, may, by God's grace, be made effectual to the salvation of souls. Inconsistency of life in a preacher is not, therefore, always a sufficient reason for refusing to hear the Word. The Bible is the rule of faith; and if a minister speak according to that Word, even though he himself may be a stranger to its power, God may use, and frequently has used, the preaching of such a man for His own glory.

On the other hand, there have always been in the Church many who, though not preaching sound doctrine, were most amiable and upright in their lives. Some of the most notorious heresiarchs have been men of unblemished outward reputation, and of simple, austere lives. Much of their success, indeed, is to be ascribed to this "sheep's clothing," which it is not necessary to suppose is always assumed with a deliberate intention to deceive. Satan is too sagacious to employ in his work agents whose character would at once condemn their teaching. On the contrary, he transforms himself into an angel of light, and causes his ministers to assume the appearance of ministers of righteousness (2 Cor. xi. 14, 15). His greatest successes are achieved when earnest, ardent, conscientious men are beguiled, as they often are for a season, into doing his work.

2. The test, therefore, if restricted to the fruit which false prophets exhibit in their lives, will not always lead

to accurate conclusions. We must look also to *the doctrines they preach.*

We may be deceived by an appearance of great spirituality of mind, and great purity and severity of life; but let us look at the doctrine preached, apart altogether from the man that preaches it. Let us take his doctrine, and bring it rigidly to the standard of God's law and testimony, that we may see if he speaks according to this Word (Isa. viii. 20). Let us consider also the *tendency* of the doctrine—the practical consequences to which it naturally leads—and whether its universal acceptance would be for the glory of God and for the peace and prosperity of Jerusalem. And if we find that the Gospel offered to us is really "another Gospel" than that which Christ and His Apostles preached—if we find that its tendency is to take our feet from the Rock, and set us upon shifting sands or slippery places—then, though the preacher be an angel from heaven, let him be anathema (Gal. i. 8)—he is no true prophet, though the hands of a whole college of cardinals and mitred prelates have been laid upon his head. He may appear outwardly like a goodly vine or fig-tree, but his fruit is not grapes or figs; it is such, rather, as is ordinarily produced by thorns or thistles. The doctrine which is of God leads to holiness in this life, and to glory in that which is to come. Every doctrine that has not this tendency, by whomsoever it may be preached, we are bound to reject as the evil fruit of a corrupt tree.

3. But, as has been said, it sometimes happens that the doctrine is unexceptionable, when the life is doubtful. Men are not easily deceived in such cases; for they are more apt to be impressed by the actions of their teachers than by their public lessons. To meet even this possibility, however, there is a third way of applying our

Lord's test for the discerning of spirits, namely, by observing *the fruits which result from their preaching*, the effects which follow their labours.

Does God own and bless their ministry, or does He not? Does He accompany their word with power and demonstration of the Spirit? Or does the field in which they labour continue barren and unproductive, or yield nothing but wild grapes? Of course, it is necessary that this application of our Lord's test be made with caution and delicacy. Many faithful and zealous ministers of Christ have laboured long with no perceptible fruit; while, on the other hand, a large measure of popularity and apparent success frequently attends the preaching of false prophets, whose errors are artfully disguised, and who have the tact to catch and enchain the attention of carnally-disposed and superficial minds. It is necessary, therefore, to beware of hasty judgments. Let us wait, and watch the issue. Let us not be carried about with every wind of doctrine, like those who have itching ears; but search the Scriptures daily, whether the things we hear are so, or not. And if we find, after due observation and inquiry, that men are really turned from sin under the preaching of the Word, that they are fleeing for refuge to the Cross of Christ, and, above all, that they are continuing in His Word, we may safely conclude that there is a genuine work of God going on; and we should be thankful that Christ is preached, and that God is pleased to raise up any instrumentality for the salvation of sinners. If, on the contrary, there be no appearance of fruit, we must not suffer ourselves to be deceived by any mere outward attractions. "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit."

"Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit," our Lord concludes, "is hewn down, and cast into the fire."

Truly a solemn warning! A warning which applies to both preachers and hearers. Every faithful minister who goeth forth bearing the precious seed, though he may weep with many and bitter tears by reason of the discouragements he encounters, shall certainly have fruit at the last. Even if he be not privileged to see it in this life, yet in the great harvest-day he shall assuredly come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him (Ps. cxxvi. 6). But fruitless minister and fruitless hearer must alike be judged by their works; and it is scarcely possible to imagine a doom more richly merited than that of the man who, surrounded by the blaze of Gospel light and Gospel privileges, remains nevertheless a slothful and unprofitable servant—a fruitless fig-tree—a barren cumberer of the ground.

May the Lord deliver us all from this dreadful doom!

# XXXV.

## PROFESSION AND PRACTICE.

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

"Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works?

"And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity"—MATT. vii. 21–23.

AS I have more than once had occasion to remark during my exposition of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, to the conclusion of which we are now drawing near,* the main scope of the discourse is to teach mankind that religion is not a name or a form, but a living reality, and that sincerity must be the characteristic of our religious profession, and of our whole lives. In the two concluding sections of the Sermon which we have still to consider, this subject is specially and formally brought before us, and demands our earnest and prayerful attention.

In the passage now before us our blessed Lord—

First, Announces the general principle, that it is not a mere profession of Christianity which shall obtain for

* In this and the following chapter the direct form of address in which the discourses were originally delivered has been retained, as being more suitable to the hortatory character of the subject.

any man admission into the kingdom of heaven, but the doing of the will of God.

Secondly, He tells us that in the last day many will plead for admission on the ground that they have prophesied and wrought miracles in His name.

But, thirdly, He declares that these pleas will be disallowed, and the pleaders excluded; because, though they may have done all that they allege, they have not done the will of God, but have been workers of iniquity.

I. Let us first look at the general principle announced, that it is not a mere profession of Christianity which shall obtain for any man admission into the kingdom of heaven, but the doing of the will of God.

The outward evidence of the Christian profession, my brethren, is the calling Christ, Lord, Lord; acknowledging Him as our Divine Master; accepting Him as our prophet, priest, and king; and looking to Him as to one that has a paramount claim to our warmest affection and most devoted obedience. No man can make such a profession in sincerity and truth otherwise than by the influence of the Holy Spirit, as the Apostle Paul expressly teaches: "No man can say that Jesus is the LORD, but by the Holy Ghost" (1 Cor. xii. 3). The Apostle obviously does not mean that it is impossible to say in words that Jesus is the LORD: he means that it is impossible for a man to acknowledge Him and submit to Him as the LORD, with all his heart, unless he is taught and enabled to do so by the Spirit of God. The very point under consideration is the distinction between calling Christ, Lord, as a mere title, and the calling Him Lord with real homage and devotion of heart. There have been thousands of false prophets who have professed attachment to Christ in the most exaggerated language, and have habitually in their

public prayers said unto Him, Lord, Lord, who have, at the same time, been both heretical in their doctrine and corrupt in their lives. And we have no reason to suppose that the Visible Church will ever be wholly secure from the intrusion of such deceitful workers, or that their attempts to beguile unstable souls will ever be entirely without success. It is, therefore, not only to false prophets that our Lord's counsel is addressed, but to those also that are exposed to the evil influence of their teaching. His counsel is addressed to all men whatever, in all ages, places, and circumstances, who, without the help of false prophets, are tempted by their own lusts, or the deceitfulness of their own hearts, or the desire of pleasing men, to call Christ, Lord, Lord, while yet they have never fled to Him as their Saviour, never cast the burden of their sins at the foot of His cross, never yielded themselves to His guidance, and never made any consistent or continuous effort to obey His commandments. Alas! how many thousands, even in this our day of light and opportunity, are content with calling Christ, Lord, Lord, and yet, so far from doing the things that He says, are living in utter neglect of their responsibilities!

Examine your own hearts, beloved. I suppose there is not one in this assembly who does not formally and outwardly draw near to Christ with the mouth and honour Him with the lip, calling Him Master and Lord, and professing to worship Him as the Son of God, the Redeemer of mankind, the Saviour of His people. So far ye say well: for such indeed He is. But if your religion has brought you no further than this, it has not brought you upon that narrow way which alone leadeth unto life. Such a religion can only bring you to shame and confusion, for it lacks the essential element, without which there can be no true spiritual life or true union

with Christ. Your religion is merely nominal, and of the flesh. You may flatter yourselves you have some knowledge of Christ, but it is evident that you know nothing yet as you ought to know. For though you may know all that can be known by the wisdom or searching of the human understanding concerning the doctrinal truths of Christianity, you know nothing of Christ personally and individually: He is nothing to you as individual sinners: you have never by the hearing of faith heard Him say to your souls, "I am thy salvation" (Ps. xxxv. 3); nor have you said to Him in response, "I am Thine!" He has not yet revealed Himself in your soul, nor have you yet apprehended Him as your Saviour: you have never sought Him with your whole heart, and He has not been found of you: you have heard of Him by the hearing of the ear, but the knowledge you have derived is neither experimental nor practical, and brings forth no fruits of righteousness.

What, then, is the element wherein you are deficient? Our Lord Himself answers you: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."

The question thus arises, What are we to understand by *doing the will of God, as a condition of obtaining entrance into the kingdom of heaven?*

If we were living under the law as a covenant of works, then, very clearly, nothing else could be understood than absolutely perfect obedience on our part to every jot and tittle of the law. The language of the law is simply, "Do this, and thou shalt live! Do not, and thou shalt die!" The law knows nothing of exceptions or reservations: it admits no excuses or palliations, or pleas of infirmity, or surprise, or forgetfulness:

the law knows nothing of mercy for the very smallest transgression: its language is peremptory, and shuts out all hope of life except on the one condition of perfect obedience.

On such a condition, salvation to sinful man is impossible; and as if to convince mankind of this truth, or at least to give them time and opportunity for conviction, God left them for four thousand years in a state of nonage or pupilage under the law, as a child is under a tutor or governor, until the time appointed of the Father. But when the fulness of the time was come, and it appeared that the world, instead of finding out God, had only wandered further and further from Him, then "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law" (Gal. iv. 1–5), and who were utterly unable by their own personal obedience to redeem themselves. But that obedience which was impossible to fallen man was rigorously rendered by the man Christ Jesus, who was holy, harmless, and undefiled, even by the smallest thought of sin; and who, though He knew no sin, was by the grace of God made sin for us, and bare our sins in His own body on the tree (1 Pet. ii. 24). Through this man salvation is preached to all the race of Adam. And the message of God to every human being is, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts xvi. 31). For though of himself no man is able to do the will of God, yet the obedience of Christ is imputed to him that believeth, and by virtue of His expiatory sacrifice and spotless righteousness, the believer stands before God as if he had never sinned, but had always done His will. Hence, under the Covenant of Grace, "to do the will of God" does not mean to offer Him our own obedience, which is imperfect, but to lay our hand by faith on the Lord Jesus,

and to rest all our hope and confidence in Him. Such is the explanation given by our Lord Himself to the people who followed Him after the miracle of the loaves, and who asked Him, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God"—or, in other words, *do the will of God?* Jesus answered, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent;" evidently intending thereby, that man cannot do the will of God, or achieve a perfect righteousness by his own works; but that he may obtain all the benefit of a perfect righteousness by believing on Christ, whom God hath sent. So our Lord adds, "And this is the will of Him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day. . . . He that believeth on me hath everlasting life" (John vi. 28, 29, *sqq.*)

To do the will of God, then, my brethren, is to believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ: not merely to say unto Him, Lord, Lord, but to believe on Him with our whole hearts, and look to His righteousness and blood as our only hope of salvation. Until you have thus done the will of God, no works that you can do can be in anywise acceptable unto God, but are rather an abomination to Him, because they proceed from carnal motives, and are not sacrifices of righteousness. But when, by the exercise of faith wrought in you by the Holy Spirit, you have laid hold on the hope of eternal life set before you in the Cross, then you are "justified" in God's sight, and God, for Christ's sake, looks upon you as righteous, and adopts you into the family of His sons. Then the work of sanctification really begins in you, and you are enabled by the work of the Spirit in your hearts to do good works, which are not indeed righteous in themselves, and have no merit, but which are acceptable to God as fruits of that righteousness

which He hath given to you for the sake of what Christ hath done and suffered in your behalf. The good works which any man doeth, in short, must follow his justification, and cannot precede it.

If, then, a sinner yet unconverted ask, How shall I do the will of God? I answer him in our Lord's words, Repent, and believe the Gospel (Mark i. 15). If one who has already believed ask the same question, I answer him in the words of St Paul, Let him that hath believed in God be careful to maintain good works (Tit. iii. 8). This is the will of God, even your sanctification (1 Thess. iv. 3). For a man to call Christ, Lord, Lord, who is still in his natural state, and not seeking to be delivered from the bondage of sin and death, or for a professing believer so to address Him while he is cherishing some bosom sin, or slumbering at his post, or living in worldly conformity, or holding back his hand from works of piety and charity, is a mockery scarcely inferior in guilt and turpitude to that of Judas, when he cried, "Hail, Master!" and betrayed Him with a kiss; or to that of His actual murderers, who put a gorgeous robe on the person of Jesus, and bowed the knee before him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

II. The Visible Church, unhappily, abounds with these "hypocritical mockers;" nor will they be thoroughly eliminated from it until the day of our Lord's re-appearing, the great day of judgment and final severance, when He shall command the angel-reapers to put in their sickles, for the harvest of the earth shall then be ripe. Until that day, by His own express command, hypocrites and true believers must be suffered to grow together (Matt. xiii. 30); for it is not for sinful man to judge his fellow-man's sincerity, or to exclude him from the communion of the faithful, unless his outward actions

are such as to bring open scandal upon the Cospel. Thus it is that our feasts of charity are not without "spots;" and thus it is that our Christian enterprises for the support and extension of Christ's cause in the earth proceed slowly and heavily. And it is no slight trial of our faith to believe that the Lord is still present with His Church when we see on every side so many that name the name of Christ, and yet do not depart from iniquity, but rather live in defiance of Him whom they insult by calling Him, Lord, Lord.

So, however, we are assured it will be until the end of the world. "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" (Luke xviii. 8.) Will He find all mankind converted? Will He come to a world watching and waiting in the patience of hope? Not so, my brethren. When Christian enterprise has done all that it can—and God forbid that our efforts should be relaxed! Let them rather be multiplied and invigorated a thousandfold!—but when all the Churches have exhausted all their efforts, the world will still be a world lying in wickedness. The work of the Churches, it should be remembered, is not to convert the whole world, but to gather Christ's people out of the world. His ministers are undoubtedly commanded to preach the Gospel to every creature; for we know not who will, and who will not, believe our report, and lay hold on eternal life. But the LORD Himself from the beginning knoweth them that are His, for He hath given them to His Son by an everlasting covenant, and not one of them shall perish; while the impenitent and unbelieving shall be left without excuse, because they would not come to Christ that they might have life.

In that day, beloved, in that great and terrible day of the Lord, some strange secrets will be disclosed. Many lowly and obscure disciples shall be exalted in that day;

and many boasting lofty pretenders shall be turned back with "everlasting shame and contempt." Some that are not admitted, our Lord here tells us, will plead that they have been more than mere professors—that they have wrought miracles in His name. "Lord, Lord," they will exclaim, in surprise that they are not immediately recognized and received with gladness, "have we not prophesied, or preached, in Thy name? have we not cast out demons? have we not done many wonderful works in Thy name? and can it be possible that WE are excluded from Thy kingdom?"

Now, it is manifest that pleas of this nature can be urged by those only who have been called to the exercise of spiritual gifts in the Church. The gifts of speaking with tongues, of prophesying, of exorcising demons, and of healing, were not by any means restricted to the ordinary pastors and elders of the Apostolic Churches, but were largely distributed among the people, to the end that the Gospel might be more extensively and rapidly diffused. There was a very general desire among the early Christians to be distinguished by these extraordinary gifts; and doubtless they were highly desirable as means of promoting the cause of Christ. But St Paul distinctly cautions the Corinthians, to whom he wrote fully on this whole subject, that while it was their duty to "covet earnestly the best gifts," there was yet "a more excellent way"—something, namely, that was more to be coveted than even these extraordinary gifts (1 Cor. xii. 31). He declares that these gifts were, *in themselves*, no better than sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. The history of the Church under the Mosaic dispensation had, indeed, shown this; for God, when occasion arose, made even wicked men His messengers and mouthpieces, and permitted false prophets and dreamers to show signs and wonders.

The history of Balaam presents a most instructive example. The witch of Endor is another (1 Sam. xxviii.; compare Deut. xiii. 1-5; Jer. xxix. 8, 9). When men forsake and shun the counsel of true prophets, God's resources are not exhausted: He can send them a message by other channels, causing even a dumb ass to speak with man's voice when the wayward madness of a wicked man must be rebuked. And we may not doubt that God has frequently permitted signs and wonders to be wrought by the power of Satan (Exod. vii. 11; 2 Thess. ii. 9; Rev. xiii. 13, &c.) The mere working of miracles, therefore, is not in itself an evidence either of a Divine commission or of a genuine work of grace in the heart. And thus the Apostle declares, that though a man may speak in all the languages of the universe, though he may have the gift of prophecy, and a faith which could remove mountains; yea, though his large-hearted benevolence prompt him to give all his goods to feed the poor, and his zeal to give his body to be burned, yet, if he have not LOVE, it profiteth him nothing.

In that day, then, it will not avail for a man to plead that he has exercised even the most extraordinary gifts in Christ's name, *if that be his only plea.* Judas himself received power, as one of the twelve, to heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out demons (Matt. x. 1–8); and it is notorious that in after-times many pretended to cast out demons by pronouncing over the possessed that name which is above every name, though the profane attempt resulted only in their own defeat and confusion (Acts xix. 13–16). But even had they succeeded, a supposition by no means inadmissible, the power by which they wrought would not have been their own, but God's, who works by what instruments He chooses; and such "wonderful works"

could not establish any claim to admission into the house when the Master had shut the door.

But these pleas, founded on miracles wrought in Christ's name, are not the only pleas that will be urged in that day. Such pleas can be urged by only a very limited number of individuals. But in the parallel passage in S. Luke's Gospel we find an important addition: "Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in Thy presence, and Thou hast taught in our streets."

This language comprehends the whole visible professing Church. It comprehends all that have eaten and drunk with Christ's people, and who have therefore eaten and drunk in His presence. How many, alas! have eaten of that bread and drunk of that cup, professing to do it in remembrance of Christ, while nevertheless they had no part or lot in Him, nor any spiritual discernment of His body, and were thus "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord!" The language, however, includes many who are not in full communion with the Church. It includes all to whom Christ's Word has in any way come; all in whose streets, or to whose ears, the message of salvation has been proclaimed, either by Himself in the days of His flesh, or by His servants after Him. It includes every one of YOU, my brethren. It cannot be said of all of you, that you have sacramentally eaten and drunk in Christ's presence But there is no necessity for so limiting the meaning. Many ate and drank in Christ's presence while He was on earth, for He came eating and drinking, and was the friend of publicans and sinners. And so the members of His body are not prohibited from eating and drinking with the sinners of this world, but rather are they enjoined to try to benefit them by manifesting towards

them all kindly feelings and human sympathies. If a Christian man, realizing the experience of the life that is hid with Christ in God (Col. iii. 3), and always bearing about in his body the dying of the Lord Jesus, goes into the society of worldly men, and eats and drinks with them, such men may truly say, "We have eaten and drunk in Christ's presence;" for Christ is always where His servants are, and the savour of His name is around them as the savour of ointment poured forth. A Christian man leaves an impression favourable to religion wherever he goes, for men instinctively, and in spite of themselves, take knowledge of him that he hath been with Jesus.

But even if there be some among you of whom it cannot be said in any sense that they have eaten and drunk in Christ's presence, it is at least certain that He hath taught in your streets: you have all heard the message of life sounded forth again and again. What then? Will hearing save you? Nay, verily, unless by Divine grace faith has come by hearing, and unless you are showing by a holy life that your faith worketh by love. No profession, no privileges, no advantages can avail you, if your hearts be not given to Christ; nay, rather shall your abundant privileges be to your condemnation. Like Chorazin and Bethsaida, you may have seen the wonderful works of Christ: like Capernaum, you may be exalted to heaven by the abundance of the revelations you have received; but if ye be not converted—if ye have not come to Christ as little children—if ye have not repented and believed,—it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, yea, for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for you.

III. We are thus led to the third part of our subject, namely, The rejection of these hypocritical pleas. These

pleas, our Lord teaches, will be disallowed, and the pleaders excluded, because, though they may have done all that they allege, they have not done the will of God, but are workers of iniquity.

"Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you"—or, as S. Luke has it, "I know you not whence ye are"—"Depart from me, ye that work iniquity!"

Observe the peculiar language employed: "I never knew you!" "I know you not whence ye are!"

There are two senses in which it may be said that Christ knows men. In the direct and literal sense He knows every man; and He knows what is in the heart of every man. He said to the unbelieving Jews, "I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you" (John v. 42). In the same sense He knows the hypocritical professors in the Visible Church: He is not deceived by their lip-service and outward exhibitions of zeal and activity. He knows them for what they really are. And when He speaks to them from the judgment-seat in the last day, He will show that He has all along detected them through their most ingenious disguises, by disclaiming all knowledge of them as His people. He will in effect say unto them, "I know you not as those who have followed Me through evil report and good report: it is true, ye may have eaten and drunk in My presence, but the Scripture is fulfilled in you, 'He that eateth bread with Me hath lifted up his heal against Me.' It is true, I have taught in your streets; I have called unto you, and stretched out My hands unto you; but ye regarded not; ye despised My counsel, and would none of My reproof: therefore now is the day of your calamity come upon you: I KNOW YOU NOT." In a word, it is those only whom Christ knows now as the

sheep of His fold, and as His followers in the wilderness, whom He will own and acknowledge in the promised land in that day when He shall make up His jewels (Mal. iii. 17).

The sentence pronounced upon the hypocritical professor is, "Depart from me!" He does not add here, "into everlasting fire;" nor was it needed; for the essence of eternal punishment consists in eternal separation from God. "Depart from me" implies an everlasting cutting off from the fountain of life and peace, a denial for ever of that grace which comes to man through Christ alone, a perpetual banishment from the presence of God to which Christ is the only way of access. As an old divine well observes:—"To depart from Christ is the very hell of hell: it is the foundation of all the misery of the damned, to be cut off from all hope of benefit from Christ and His mediation."

And observe, I pray you, the ground on which this awful sentence is pronounced: "Ye that WORK INIQUITY." Remember, I pray you, that our Lord is not here speaking of the ungodly mass of mankind, who make no profession of religion at all; but of professing Christians, who call Christ, Lord, Lord. There is not among those who have any belief in a future state of rewards and punishments any question as to the doom of the openly and grossly wicked of this world, who reject God and His holy Word, and follow the lusts of their own hearts, scoffing at Divine truth, and abjuring, in works if not in words, all allegiance to Jehovah and His Anointed. Eternal death is acknowledged to be the righteous doom of all such. But the question here is of those who name the name of Christ, and who very possibly lead comparatively blameless lives, and make a fair show in the flesh. Our Lord in another place said,

"There is no man which shall do a miracle in My name that can lightly speak evil of Me" (Mark ix. 39). He spake thus concerning one that was casting out demons in His name, though he was not an avowed follower, and had never been received into the fellowship of the disciples. The Apostle John, who in his earlier days was by no means the meek and loving child of God he afterwards became, had called the attention of Jesus to the doings of this irregular exorcist, and appeared to claim credit for himself and his brother Apostles because they had forbidden him, on the ground that he followed not with them. Our Lord rebuked this zealous but uncharitable Boanerges. He would not have the man forbidden; "For," said He, "he that is not against us is on our part." But although this be a most wise and equitable rule for the guidance of the fallible office-bearers of the Visible Church, it will be of no force when the Judge is He that discerneth the thoughts and intents of the heart. That infallible and heart-searching Judge hath Himself told us, that in the last great day many will plead before Him that they have done miracles in His name, whom nevertheless He will banish from His presence for ever as workers of iniquity. He knows that it is quite possible, nay, that it is not an uncommon case, for men to have a high reputation for piety, whose hearts are nevertheless devoted to ambition or covetousness, or it may be to some secret vice, which they for a long time succeed in concealing from the eyes of their fellow-men. But in that day all masks shall be torn off, all hidden works of darkness shall be brought to light, and "every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matt. xii. 36).

And let not any man speak false comfort to himself

by saying, "I am no hypocrite, at all events: I make no profession of great piety: no man can accuse me of pretending to be more than I am!" Alas! what a miserable apology is this! In that day there will be only two classes of men recognized: they that have done the will of God, and they that have done iniquity. Every man that has not done the will of God by believing in Him that He hath sent, and seeking conformity to the image of Christ, is a worker of iniquity, and has brought condemnation upon himself by preferring the darkness to the light, and rejecting the only hope of salvation. Thou art not a hypocrite! It is well. What, then, art thou? Art thou a true believer? Hast thou laid hold on the Gospel Covenant, and those exceeding great and precious promises which are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus? Hast thou come out from an ungodly world, and cast thy heart's idols to the moles and to the bats? Art thou faithfully occupying the post thy Lord hath assigned thee, and employing the talents He hath entrusted to thee for His glory? Or art thou hiding thy Lord's money, and contenting thyself with doing nothing? Oh, sad delusion! Wilt thou not understand that they who do nothing are in the most emphatic sense "workers of iniquity?"

Beloved brethren, search your hearts as in God's sight. Play not fast and loose with your convictions! Deceive not your souls with the vain imagination that you can turn to the Lord at any time, and that it will be soon enough to attend to the concerns of eternity when the hey-day of youth is past, and the fever of the blood has subsided. How long halt ye between two opinions? If Jehovah be God, follow Him: but if Baal, or the world, or the flesh, be God, be consistent, and follow the God your heart acknowledges.

Who among you is on the Lord's side? let him not hesitate to confess his Saviour before men. Let him be separate from the ungodly, and touch not the unclean thing. So shall God Himself be a Father unto him, and he shall be called the child of God!

And that this may be the happy lot of all here present, let us now make our humble supplication at the throne of grace!

## XXXVI.

## THE ROCK AND THE SAND.

"Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:
"And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.
"And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:
"And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it."—MATT. vii. 24-27.

IN the three verses immediately preceding, we had before us the distinction between profession and practice—the distinction between those who say unto Christ, Lord, Lord, but whose religion ends there, and those who are doing the will of God by believing in Christ, and honestly striving to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit. In the last day, our Lord tells us, many will seek admission into the kingdom of heaven on the ground that they have not only acknowledged Christ outwardly, by calling Him, Lord, Lord, but have also prophesied, or perhaps have even wrought miracles, in His name. Nay, some will even plead their Church membership, or the privileges they have enjoyed as citizens of a country in which Christ has publicly taught by the labours of His ministering servants. But all such pleas, we are well assured, will be peremptorily rejected, and these hypocrites will

be exhibited before the assembled world in their true character, as "workers of iniquity."

The subject brought before us in the concluding section of the Sermon on the Mount, to which I now invite your attention, is not essentially different from the subject of the preceding section. Substantially the same lesson is taught in both sections; but it is now presented in a somewhat different form, and is illustrated by a very striking and beautiful comparison.

I must again remind you that our Lord's admonitory language is not addressed to open unbelievers or gross sinners; not to heathen nations that have never heard the Gospel trumpet; not to the ignorant victims of falsehood or superstition of whatever kind; but to those who have heard the Word of Christ as it is revealed in the Scriptures; to those who have been made acquainted with the message of God to sinners, either by the ordinary preaching of the Gospel, or in any other way whatever. Our present concern is not with those who have no knowledge of true religion at all: but with those who have been told in some way or other that they are sinners, and have need of a Saviour; that Jesus Christ is the Saviour provided for them by the sovereign grace of God; that eternal life is prepared for all that truly believe in Jesus; and that he that believeth not shall receive the eternal punishment due to his sins. In the verses now before us these hearers of Christ's sayings are divided into two classes, namely, those who HEAR, and DO THEM; and those who HEAR, and DO THEM NOT. And the subject we have to consider is the distinction between *hearing and doing* and *hearing only.*

It is a very great privilege, my brethren, involving a very great responsibility, to hear the sayings of Christ

in any way whatever. The mere existence of Christian ordinances in any country and the nominal profession of Christianity by the bulk of the population, creates a marked difference between that country and other countries whose inhabitants are under the influence of Mohammedan imposture or pagan superstitions. Even the corrupt forms of Christianity which are maintained by the Greek and Roman Churches are better than those religions in which there is no Christian element at all. But without further reference to other lands, let us look to ourselves. All the blessings we enjoy, as men, as citizens, and as immortal beings, we owe to the Gospel of Christ. Christianity is the parent of true liberty and of true equality. The Bible freely circulated and read, and the blessed Gospel freely and fully proclaimed, are not only calculated to awaken in men's souls the hope of a glorious immortality, but they bring also all earthly blessings in their train. To have these glad tidings of great joy brought to our doors is an unspeakable privilege; for even those that only lodge in the branches, or live under the shadow of this most goodly tree, without having as yet actually eaten of the fruit, enjoy immeasurable advantages over the rest of their brethren of mankind. It is simply the practical inconsistency of the majority of professing Christians—simply the fact that so many are content to enjoy the outward benefits which the Gospel has conferred upon them, and seek not the inward, spiritual, and eternal grace which distinguishes the real from the sham—simply the melancholy fact that while some *hear and do*, there remains a vast multitude that *hear and do not;* it is simply this distinction that hinders the completion of the kingdom of grace, and the final establishment of the kingdom of glory.

Blessed be God, who hath never, even in the darkest

ages, left Himself without a witness, there are SOME that hear and do! The faithful preaching of Christ's Word is never altogether in vain. The results are not, indeed, always brilliantly conspicuous: we do not often witness Pentecostal effusions: great revivals of religion are few and far between. But where the genuine seed is sown, and carefully harrowed in by prayer for the heavenly dews and sunshine which alone can cause it to fructify, the promise is sure, that "they which sow in tears shall reap in joy." This promise is our encouragement to fidelity and perseverance, even though we should labour for many years, and see little or no fruit of our labours. This, however, is comparatively rare. Ordinarily, there is a manifest result, though unhappily it is much below what we desire and might reasonably expect. But, generally speaking, there is, in every professedly Christian congregation in which the Gospel has been faithfully preached, at least a small body of true believers, in whose hearts the good seed has taken root, who have been led to feel and acknowledge their responsibilities, who are humbly looking to the Saviour as the Author and Finisher of their faith, and are endeavouring to walk in love and holy obedience.

It is this little flock that is the real Church, known and beloved of God; but their number and their names are infallibly known to Him alone. Church membership, outwardly eating and drinking in Christ's presence, is not always a certain proof that a man is a true member of Christ's spiritual body; for many dip their hands with Christ in the dish, and afterwards betray Him. A perfectly pure communion can never be realized upon earth; but nevertheless every true believer is individually exhorted to seek earnestly for the assurance of his own calling and election, as for a thing which he may and ought to attain, and not to rest satisfied until he has

attained it. And the evidence on which this Christian assurance must be founded is comprehended in this one word "DO." I mean, my brethren, that the testing question by which we should try ourselves now, as it will be the testing question by which we shall be tried in the last day, is, DO I believe in Him whom God hath sent? DO I work the works of Him that hath called me? Or am I of those who say, and DO NOT?

It is a most painful and humiliating truth, of which I would willingly refrain from speaking if I durst, but which the stern responsibility of my office as a watchman upon the walls of Jerusalem compels me to declare, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear, that a very large proportion of the Visible Church consists of those who hear and say, but DO NOT. Too well and too painfully every Christian minister knows that many of those whom he addresses as brethren are not really such. Too well and too painfully we know that even of those who actually eat and drink with us at the table of the Lord, there are many that have not on the wedding-garment, if they be not open enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil. iii. 18). Without pretending to have the power of discerning the secret thoughts and intents of any man's heart, we can have no hesitation in saying, at least, that in too many instances there is no perceptible evidence of a saving change having been wrought. There may be outward respectability and observance of ordinary morality, but these are found also in many that make no profession of Christianity. In one who calls himself a Christian, and is admitted to the fellowship of Christ's Church, we look for something more than that mere conventional morality, the absence of which would exclude him even from respectable society in this world. We expect him not only to come and hear Christ's sayings as expounded in the stated

ministry of the earthly sanctuary—a duty in which many professing Christians are very negligent—but also to DO according to those sayings which he hears. We expect him to go forth into the world without the camp, bearing Christ's reproach, and confessing Him before men. We expect some evidences of sincerity and zeal in Christ's service. We expect him to lend a hand in doing the actual work of the Lord. The ordinances of religion, the service of God's house on earth, the management of the temporal affairs of congregations, the business of associations for the relief of physical or spiritual destitution, or for the spread of the Gospel in the world, are not to be carried on without some expenditure of time and thought, and some sacrifice of convenience, as well as of money.

Lay this well to heart, my brethren. There is frequently a want of common sense, and, I say it with sorrow, a still more lamentable want of conscientiousness displayed by professing Christians in the affairs of religion, which they would consider utterly disgraceful if exhibited by any man in the management of his daily business. That this may be the effect of thoughtlessness in many instances, rather than of want of principle, I willingly believe. But surely a thoughtless spirit can scarcely be consistent with true spiritual life: surely if a man hear Christ's sayings, and understand what he hears, he must know that hearing alone is not enough—that even faith alone is not enough—that he is expected to DO. And if the slothful nominal professor, who makes no pretence of doing anything, be justly deserving of censure, of how much heavier censure, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who actually professes his readiness to do, and promises to do, and deliberately undertakes certain duties, on the faithful performance

of which the payment of lawful obligations, or the progress of the Lord's work, may instrumentally depend, and who nevertheless DOES THEM NOT; but is either absent altogether at the time when his presence or effective aid is expected, or comes, having neglected or carelessly performed the duty he had undertaken. If a man were to act thus with regard to duties for which he expected to be paid in money, his conduct would be characterized as both foolish and dishonest, and his reputation would be irreparably injured. Christians are expected to serve Christ, not for lucre's sake, but with a ready mind, looking for the recompense of reward to the future glory. But certainly it can never be imagined that a lower standard of fidelity and punctuality is to be tolerated in the Church of Christ than would be tolerated in the affairs of any secular institution. Surely they who act according to a lower standard say in effect that their confidence is in earthly things, and that they have no confidence in Christ's word. *Such are they who hear and do not.*

If, in endeavouring to illustrate the distinction between hearing and doing, and hearing and not doing, I have seemed to insist too much on *that sort of doing* which relates to the affairs of congregations and religious societies, it has not been because I consider activity of this sort as the highest form that Christian zeal can assume, but rather because it is in these affairs that want of earnestness is most practically and severely felt. Such activity must not be taken as though it were the sum and substance of vital godliness; for if it proceed not from the love of Christ in the heart, it is vain, and will be exerted in vain. I am satisfied, however, that the man who patiently, conscientiously, and quietly does the work of the Church, from day to day, and

from year to year, attracting no notice, and courting no applause, gives far stronger evidence of the highest kind of faith and devotion, than the man who makes a pretentious demonstration now and then, and shows by the apathy that succeeds that he is deficient both in principle and perseverance. It is by no means uncommon to find a man ready to exert himself where some of the glory and honour will accrue to himself: but far higher and nobler is the faith and patience of him who is content to labour for his Lord in humble obscurity, and with little present encouragement, but nevertheless looking steadfastly onward and upward, in the full assurance that such labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

Let us now look at the comparison by which our Lord illustrates the distinction between them that hear and do, and them that hear and do not. He compares them respectively to two builders, one of them wise, the other foolish.

The wise builder knows that the thing essential to give stability and security to his house is a firm foundation. There are probably few men so deficient in common sense as to attempt the erection of any house for permanent occupation without taking some pains to secure a good foundation. Every one knows that if the foundation be bad it is useless to expend time and money upon the superstructure, or upon its decoration and ornament. The wise builder digs deep (Luke vi. 48), and lays his foundation upon the rock; and then he feels encouraged to bestow both thought and outlay upon the building, that it may be not only strong and stable, but beautiful also.

It does not fall to every man's lot to build a house

for his habitation in this world; but each one of us, my brethren, has a house to build which is not of this world. And it were much to be desired that the wisdom which we can all appreciate, and are all ready to exercise when occasion requires it, in the building of an edifice of brick or stone, were more generally exercised in our building for eternity. For the house that we all have to build is no other than OUR HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE. By nature we are without spiritual life, dead in trespasses and sins, children of wrath, and heirs of everlasting condemnation. But God of His infinite mercy hath called us to a lively hope in the Gospel of His Son—a hope of eternal life to all that believe in Jesus. And though it be true that salvation, in all its stages, belongeth to God alone: though it be true that "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy;" yet it is also true that ALL are invited to come, and take the water of life freely.

There is perhaps no man, of all the sons of Adam, who has not some hope of eternal life. It is not conceivable that any man should look with complacency on eternal misery as his inevitable destiny. Some speculative infidels have endeavoured to comfort themselves by a theory of ultimate annihilation, and have cherished the delusion that death is an eternal sleep, from which there shall be no awakening. But we are so constituted, that we can neither believe this doctrine, nor find consolation in this prospect. We have a secret dread, an inward horror, of falling into nought. The soul, as the poet has observed, "shrinks back on herself, and startles at destruction." In short, the love of our life is a part of our nature: there is that within us which tells us that what we call death is not the close of our existence, but that a future is before us, the happiness

or misery of which will be determined by our life in this world. All men have some perception, however faint and rudimentary, of their accountability, and of a future day of retribution; and most men profess to have some concern for their future state, and to regard eternal life as the object of their highest aspirations and efforts. All of us, in a word, are building a house for eternity of some kind or other. We all have an apprehension of judgment to come, kept alive in our breasts by a consciousness of daily sin; and we all, naturally, and independently of the teachings of revelation, seek some refuge and stronghold against the evil day. And such is our readiness to believe the best of ourselves, and to yield to the whispers of our own indolence and self-love, that probably few men look forward to the hour of death without some hope that, in some way or other, it shall be well with them hereafter.

To all such builders the words of our blessed Lord are most emphatically addressed. He tells you that though all of you are building, yet not all are building wisely; and hence the important question for every one of you to ask himself is, Am *I* a wise builder? Am *I* building upon the Rock—that sure foundation which God Himself hath laid in Zion, and concerning which it is written, "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ?" (1 Cor. iii. 11.) Does my hope of eternal life rest upon what Christ hath done and suffered? And am I labouring honestly and diligently to bring to a completion the house which, by the help of God's Holy Spirit, I am building upon that foundation?

These are questions which cannot be truly answered without careful introspection of our hearts, and the counsel of the Word of Truth. Men too frequently deceive themselves—willingly deceive themselves—into

the persuasion that they have a good foundation for their hopes, when, in truth they have taken little pains to ascertain what that foundation is. To reach the solid rock, on which alone it is safe to build, we must dig, often with much labour and self-denial, through a large superincumbent mass of sand, and cast it away. There is always a vast amount of rubbish, which Satan and his agents, the world and the flesh, have heaped up to hinder us from reaching the Rock; but all this we must resolutely cut through, never ceasing, never flinching, until our feet are planted securely on the abiding foundation. This is not easy: it involves sacrifices from which flesh and blood shrink: but it is WISE, because it is SAFE.

The foolish builder acts very differently. His thoughts are chiefly concerned about the superstructure. He desires to erect a house very attractive to the eye, and of which men shall everywhere speak, and praise its glory and beauty. He will therefore often bestow more labour and expense upon the walls and architectural decorations of his edifice, than would have been necessary to obtain a foundation upon the rock; but that labour which appears not above the surface, such a builder loves not, for all his works he doeth to be seen of men. Hence many a showy spiritual fabric, which has long challenged the admiration of the multitude, is proved, when days of trial come, to have been built upon sand.*

The "sand" upon which too many are building their hopes of eternal life may be simply interpreted as *anything*

* In the literal view of our Lord's comparison, "sand" must be understood to mean *alluvial soil*, or land on the banks of rivers subject to floods. Under other circumstances, a sandy foundation is not necessarily a bad one. Our Lord's comparison was addressed to those to whom "the swelling of Jordan" was not a mere figure of speech (Jer. xii. 5, xlix. 19; compare Ps. xc. 5, Nahum i. 8).

*that is not rock.* Jesus Christ is the only sure foundation; every other foundation is sand. Whatever prevents the soul from getting close to the Saviour is sand. *Our own righteousness* is a foundation on which we are always tempted to build; for proud man is always unwilling to believe that his best righteousness, being imperfect, cannot avail for his justification before God. Therefore we must needs delve through all this superficial stratum of our own works, until we get down to the pure and spotless righteousness of Christ, on which alone we shall be able to stand securely. So, likewise, there are many who build upon their *privileges*, natural or adventitious. The Jews thought they must be saved, because they were Abraham's seed (Matt. iii. 9); and I believe many in the present day have scarcely a more rational foundation. Men think they shall be saved, and have no fears of the "overrunning flood," because they have been born of Christian parents, and have had a Christian education, or perhaps because they have a doctrinal knowledge of Gospel truth, and occasionally display a considerable amount of zeal, especially in the cause of their own denomination. Sand! sand! Miserable sand! All these pretended foundations must be resolutely and unsparingly cut through, in order that we may win Christ, and be found "rooted and built up in Him" (Col. ii. 7). Highly valuable as religious privileges and opportunities are, and great as is the responsibility of those who enjoy them, they are, as a foundation for the hope of eternal life, no better than dung and offal (Phil. iii. 7, 8), and will not abide the coming tempest.

Let us look then, finally, at the results of these different styles of building; or rather, at the consequences of building on these different foundations.

The wise man's house stands when the showers of *affliction* descend upon it—when it pleases Heaven "to rain all manner of shames and sores on his bare head." It stands when the hour of tribulation or persecution because of the Word cometh—when floods of the ungodly compass him about, and threaten to overwhelm his soul. It stands when the cold blasts of adversity, or the fiercer storms of temptation blow, so that he is "ready to halt," and his feet well-nigh slip; but yet he falls not altogether, for his feet are upon the Rock (Ps. xxvii. 5, xl. 2). The blessed Saviour Himself hath trodden the way of suffering, and persecution, and temptation before us; and having been Himself tempted, He knows how to succour them that are tempted. Let it not be doubted, then, that the wise man's house will stand in that still greater and more terrible day, when "our God shall come, and shall not keep silence; when fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about Him" (Ps. l. 3). Then the righteous man, whose faith and hope are firmly moored upon the Rock of Ages, "shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him,"—he shall eat for ever of that bread which endureth unto everlasting life; and "his waters shall be sure" (Isa. xxxiii. 16),—he shall drink for ever of that "pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, which proceedeth out of the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev. xxii. 1).

Very different shall be the end of the foolish builder. His house may be as attractive outwardly as that of the wise builder. It may stand, and frequently does stand, in fair weather, when the Church is at peace, or when he is assailed by no temptations of more than ordinary violence. But no sooner does the sun rise with a burning heat—no sooner is he threatened with loss of

fame or fortune for the Word's sake, than he is offended, and his house is swept away. It is not under the shadow of the bramble, which so many with strange infatuation prefer to the fatness of the olive, or the wine that cheereth God and man (Judges ix. 8–15); it is not from those sandy foundations on which so many build, that we can hope to find shelter or consolation, either amidst the storms of life, or in those sifting seasons of trial which God sometimes sends upon His Church for its greater purification.

And if the foolish man's house will not stand against these lesser storms, how shall it abide the tempests of death and judgment, and the vengeance of eternal fire? Alas! it has no foundation: it cannot abide: it must fall; and the ruin of that house shall be great (Luke vi. 49). "The sinner's hope shall be cut off, and his trust shall be as the spider's web: he shall lean upon his house, but it shall not stand: he shall hold it fast, but it shall not endure" (Job viii. 14, 15). "The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place" (Isa. xxviii. 17), in a moment, and for ever! In that day of wonders and revealing of secrets, many will find, to their unutterable shame and confusion, that they have been betrayed by the error of their own hearts, when it is too late to repair the error. Let every man, then, take heed to the foundation on which he is building. Deceive not your own souls in a matter of infinite and eternal importance; but "give diligence to make your calling and your election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:" the flood may rise, and the stream beat vehemently upon your house, but they shall not be able to shake it, for it is founded upon a rock; and "so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting king-

dom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. i. 10, 11).

How appropriately does this *parable*, for such it may be called, of the wise and foolish builders, terminate our Lord's Sermon on the Mount. It is a sermon on Christian duty; an exposition of the character of "the perfect man," the man of truth and uprightness—a character to which none of us can fully attain in this life, but which we are commanded to set before us as the object of our constant aim and endeavour. This, then, is the conclusion of the whole matter—the lesson to which this whole sermon leads us—that "CHRIST IS ALL," and that without Him there is neither wisdom, nor righteousness, nor eternal life.

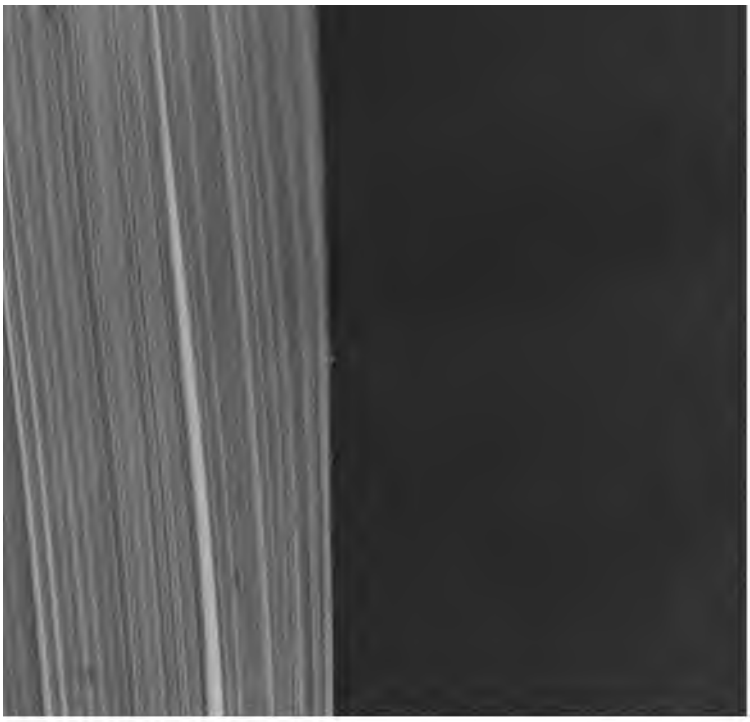
Our blessed Lord taught these things with authority. He was a teacher sent from God; and the truths which He taught, as well as the manner in which He delivered them, gave evidence of His Divine commission. He spake as never man spake. And accordingly we read that "the people were astonished at His doctrine" (ver. 28). They could not but be astonished; for never before or since has such doctrine been taught in such a manner by man on earth. The scribes and all human teachers have no original and inherent authority of their own: the best of us can only speak what we have seen and heard, or what we have ourselves been taught. But Jesus needed not that any man should teach Him; for all the fountains of human thought and experience were unsealed to His eye. Well, therefore, might the multitudes that heard be astonished at His doctrine. Unhappily, in the majority of instances, astonishment was the only effect produced: men heard, and marvelled, but they were not led to repentance

and faith; they would not come to Him that they might have life.

If, then, the preaching of the Divine COUNSELLOR Himself had so little visible effect, can we be surprised that men are so slow to receive the Word from the lips of His servants? Is it surprising that in this "age of progress" many of the wise of this world should esteem the preaching of the Cross foolishness? Is it surprising that many should wait on the ministry of the Word, and go away, saying, We have heard strange things to-day; but forget what manner of men they themselves were shown to be in the mirror of God's Word; and forget the urgent necessity for fleeing to the Cross of Christ which the discovery of their spiritual state had demonstrated?

Oh, beloved brethren, vainly are all the treasures of science and scholarship brought to the investigation and illustration of the Word of God; vainly do Christ's ministers, according to the ability given to every man, endeavour to rouse the conscience, or kindle the fire of Divine love in your hearts, if Christ Himself be not your teacher. When all our efforts and all our stores have been expended, we may perhaps have succeeded in exciting astonishment; but beyond this human teachers cannot go.

My beloved brethren, for whom I labour in the Lord, and for whose souls I watch as one that must give account, I have at length, by the good hand of my God upon me, and according to the grace and opportunity vouchsafed unto me, completed the exposition of this wondrous portion of the Book of Life. You may well believe that I have not spoken these things unto you without much careful inquiry, meditation, and prayer.

And now, what is to be the result? Perhaps some of you may be able to say you have received instruction—that you have heard things explained which you had never understood before. So far, it is well that your attention has been aroused; and for any spiritual benefit you have received, to God's name be all the glory! But, oh, beloved, see that it end not there! See that DOING follows your HEARING. Show by renewed piety and zeal that your house is built on the only true Foundation; or, when the rains descend, and the floods come, and the winds blow, and beat upon that house, it will fall, and great will be the fall of it!

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